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CHINA COAST TALES

BY

LISE BOEHM. pseud.

. un volume que les sottises humaines m'ont aisément fourni.

LE DIABLE BOITEUX.

SHANGHAI—HONGKONG—YOKOHAMA—SINGAPORE :
KELLY AND WALSH, LIMITED.

1898

Nota Bene!

The confiding reader is expected to believe :—

That the aim of these *Tales* is to illustrate life at the various Treaty Ports which have been opened, oyster-like, by the bayonet during the past fifty years.

That no attempt has been made to caricature individuals, but rather to portray types of ordinary occurrence.

That while the vehicle of these *Tales* is fiction, their essence is fact.

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No. 1.

DOBSON'S DAUGHTER

A CHINA COAST TALE

BY

LISE BOEHM.

DOBSON'S DAUGHTER.

His daughter, with her mother's eyes!

CHAPTER I.

FOOCHOW was convulsed, was rent in pieces, by a new excitement.

The port was going to sleep commercially, that was certain; but it was always astir socially. True, it was so far away both from Shanghai and from Hong Kong, that it was out of the wash, so to speak, of their social revolutions. But this very distance from the great Eastern centres of fashionable typhoons had given Foochow, in commotions, an individuality of its own.

Foochow had its own particular favourites, leaders of fashion, etiquette, and laws of precedence. In short, it had everything that renders a port formidable to a new-comer and delightful to an old resident.

For Foochow had its old residents, the list of whom was headed by the British Consul and his wife, who had adorned the port for the last fifteen years. On the other hand, among the shifting population, *i.e.* amongst those who made no permanent mark on Foochow society, would have to be reckoned the entire Customs' staff. The Commissioners at any rate had been mostly antiquated, out-of-date men, who looked upon this place as their last post in China, and occupied themselves solely with piling dollars against their coming retirement. The assistants had been either rabid sinologues or affable bachelors. From all of which it ought to follow that Foochow was a most peaceable port, a

haven of rest to be sighed after by luckless officials whose lines had fallen in places renowned for quarrelling. And yet it was not so, nor had it been so during the memory of that generation.

What they were constantly quarrelling about (by "they" be it understood the foreign residents) was indeed a puzzle to outsiders. Such trivial things would start a blaze. Now it would be one lady taken in to dinner before another one; or one not asked to sing at a concert; or an invitation worded unceremoniously. At any rate, and in every case, something to do with a woman. There were too many of them in Foochow, so the most abandoned bachelor, Matthew Dobson, declared. They were all jealous of each other, all trying to oust each other, all slandering each other. But then Matthew Dobson was a pronounced woman-hater, a man whose good opinion no woman ever tried to cultivate.

Men, perhaps, thought better of him. He was about fifty, and the head of the largest tea-hong in Foochow. He had a lovely house, with a fine view across the river to the Swiss-looking Chinese city on the opposite bank. He knew more about tea-tasting than any other man in the place. And yet he was hated by the ladies, because he hated them.

And it was about this same Matthew Dobson that the excitement was now raging. He, who had not entered a lady's door in Foochow since time unknown, had actually gone and called on the new Commissioner's wife.

The new Commissioner, like all his predecessors, was a man whose career in China was drawing to a close. An amiable, if somewhat feeble-minded man, he had been an immense favourite during a great number of years. Then, after having stuck to his post for some ten or twelve years, he went home on leave, and returned married. Very much married, his most intimate friends said with a good-natured laugh at first. Too much married, they said after a year's experience of Mrs. Bradley;

pitiably under his wife's thumb, after three years; poor fellow, how marriage can ruin even the sweetest and best of tempers! after ten years. But then, on the other hand, Mrs. Bradley had been singularly unfortunate in the society into which she had been thrown since her arrival in the East. Each port had held some one, if not more, dreadful specimen of humanity. It was quite astonishing how her ill-luck had followed her. For instance, such an out-of-the-way port as Wênchow had always been looked upon as perfectly peaceful till Mrs. Bradley arrived. The foreign residents, including of course infants in arms, scarcely amounted to a score. And yet before she had been there six months the place was utterly unbearable. The dearest friends were bitterest foes. Yet, who was responsible for the ill-feeling? Certainly not kind-hearted Mrs. Bradley!

Still, a very doubtful report of her temper had preceded Mrs. Bradley's arrival in Foochow. For the last five years she had adorned (and made a Gehinnom of, said her enemies,) one of the smaller southern ports. During the early days of her sojourn there, accounts of various festivities, in which her name had figured largely, had appeared in the Hong Kong papers. For she was undoubtedly a most energetic woman, and the community had need of a little stirring up. But then came the seemingly inevitable reaction. Mrs. Bradley tried the patience of some lady (her quarrels invariably began with her own sex) too much. The lady complained, and appealed to some champion of the opposite sex. He took up the quarrel. Mr. Bradley was made to take up his wife's quarrel. And then followed—what had always followed in other ports—mutual recriminations, slanderings, insults in public, threats of legal proceedings, apologies, reconciliations, fresh hostilities, reports of proceedings to headquarters, and finally, the transfer of the Bradleys to Foochow, in order, it was whispered, to punish or spite some other official who had offended some one of the wire-pullers at some distant place.

It must be supposed that Matthew Dobson knew just as much about the Commissioner and his wife as every one else in Foochow knew. He was a member of the Club, and went there regularly every evening at 7 o'clock for his sherry and bitters. He had, of course, called on the Commissioner in his office. And yet Mrs. Bradley had scarcely been in the place a month before he went and paid her a regular state visit, on her "day," and just before the whole fashionable world of Foochow assembled there.

Thereby he naturally offended some of his best and oldest friends. It had come to be so generally recognised in Foochow that Mr. Dobson did not call on ladies that there was not a wife among them who objected to her husband's intimacy with this person so sadly lacking in taste. All the ladies were in the same condemnation. But this call, in due form, ushered in by a card from what was evidently a new copper-plate, was a gross insult to the older residents at Foochow. So at any rate the ladies said, and to this opinion there was only one dissentient voice, naturally that of Mrs. Bradley herself.

The matter was discussed fully the next day at what was a regular institution in Foochow—the Ladies' Working Party, in aid of the local Chinese hospital. This L.W.P. had been started by a missionary's wife, and had at first been much looked down upon by society in general, as not emanating from the Consulate. But when the missionary's wife succumbed to dysentery, the reins of management fell, as a matter of course, into Mrs. Curtis's hands. And from that day forward every lady in Foochow had belonged to the Working Party.

It was, indeed, quite a mark of being in society, equivalent to being elected by ballot to a Club, to belong to this Working Party. In former years, under missionary superintendence, it had met, once a week, at the various houses of the different members. Mrs. Curtis had improved on this plan. The class now always met at the Consulate. Formerly, too, it had opened with a Bible

reading, continued with scandal and local gossip, and ended with tea, cakes, and prayer, the latter conducted by the estimable missionary herself. Mrs. Curtis, with a fine perception of the fitness of things, had abolished the Bible reading and prayer, and had introduced fancy work as an adjunct to the plain sewing of uncouth Chinese garments insisted on by her predecessor. And by these means she conciliated all the creeds. For no one in Foochow ever dreamed of quarrelling with Mrs. Curtis. Her husband, it is true, often quarrelled with various leading merchants; but his wife, never. She got her own way, somehow or other, but not by such vulgar means as quarrelling. Indeed, no one who saw her could imagine her as anything but kind-hearted, gossiping; but, so far as malice went, harmless. Her tongue might do mischief, but certainly not intentionally.

But even Mrs. Curtis had felt hurt at Matthew Dobson's conduct.

"You see, my dear," she explained to Mrs. Cross, wife of the agent for the firm of Dunbar and Co., "I look upon Mr. Dobson's call as a positive insult to poor dear Mrs. Bradley. She hasn't come yet, and so I can explain what I mean. Annie, dear, won't you run up to amah, and ask her to find me that green silk I was looking for this morning?"

Annie—a thin, flaxen-haired maiden of some 13 years, who had been listening greedily to the animated conversation between some six of the ladies and Mrs. Curtis—rose very slowly and unwillingly, and walked out of the room.

"What makes this visit so strange," Mrs. Curtis went on, dropping her voice to a tone of mystery, "is that Mr. Dobson is making great changes in his household. At least, so the Chinese say. My amah,—you know her, Mrs. Cross,—who has been with me ever since Annie was born, tells me there has been painting and varnishing going on for the last month. Last steamer brought a very handsome suite of furniture up from Hong Kong.

A brass bedstead, with a most elaborate wire-mattress, and such a handsome looking-glass. It almost looks as if he were going to be married! And my amah tells me he has even made the usual changes in his household arrangements—you know, my dear! And then this call on Mrs. Bradley! What can that mean? If he wanted us all to do the civil by his wife, why on earth didn't he begin at the right place, and in the right order?"

"Mr. Dobson married! Quite ridiculous, wouldn't it be?" said Mrs. Cross, with an appealing giggle to the other ladies. "Why shouldn't he be getting himself a new bedroom suite? Don't you think that possible, Mrs. Curtis?"

"That doesn't account for what amah told me, does it?"

No, it didn't. The ladies worked on in convinced silence for three minutes.

"Amah also says, there is a lady expected there. She heard it from the cook's wife, who is her husband's sister. That was the reason given to the servants for all those changes. I didn't myself think he was a marrying man, and he hasn't been home for nearly a year! There's only one alternative to his being married, and that is that some niece or other of his has been left an orphan, and he is going to adopt her. But if so, why did he go and call on Mrs. Bradley? She's not the kind of woman to—"

Annie's reappearance in the room, with the skein of missing green silk, choked the flood of Mrs. Curtis' eloquence. It was immediately followed by a ring at the front-door bell. And shortly after, just in time to account for a hasty toilette after slumber, the sleepy-eyed "boy" brought in two cards on a salver. They were a gentleman's cards, and bore the name

Mr. Matthew Dobson.

Mrs. Curtis read the name out in a slow and solemn tone, as though she were repeating a response in the Commination Service.

"Wanchee see me, wanchee see master, boy?"

"Wanchee see you."

"Shall I see him?" Mrs. Curtis asked, appealing to the six. They of course voted "yes," being indeed devoured with curiosity both as to what had brought Mr. Dobson there, and as to how Mrs. Curtis meant to receive him.

"Can see, boy! Annie, you must go up to amah, and stay till I call you."

The scowl on Annie's face as she left the room was edifying to behold. And poor Mrs. Curtis's little scheme for keeping her daughter away from this dangerous member of society was in vain after all. Mr. Dobson met Annie just outside the drawing-room door, and naturally enough exchanged a greeting with her. Not a very brief one either, for Matthew was a lover of children, and was moreover feeling slightly, just a trifle, nervous at his coming interview with the first lady in Foochow.

But the boy flung open the door only too soon, and Matthew Dobson found himself, for the first time for many years, alone in the midst of seven ladies, elaborately attired, with the stiffest of society-expressions on their countenances.

Not a single one looked friendly. None, indeed, looked up at all, save only Mrs. Curtis, who was of course bound to be civil in her own house. She half rose to meet him with the stiffest of little bows. For the Consul's wife knew that not only were the ears, if not the eyes, of all Foochow upon her at that moment, but that whatever tone she adopted now would be faithfully followed by all the six ladies present. And, after all, this was a case of *noblesse oblige*, and much as she might feel inclined to be soft and sweet to the returning sinner, still she owed a higher duty to the whole community, and Mrs. Curtis was too public-spirited to shirk such an obvious duty.

If Mr. Dobson had come to her yesterday, or when by herself, well and good. Perhaps—. But to come on a Working Party

day! Mrs. Curtis fanned herself vigorously as she opened out on the unsuspecting visitor.

"I think this is the first time you have been in this house in my day, Mr. Dobson?"

She had never spoken to him before, and he had looked so hot and, she fancied, uncomfortable in a stiff and unaccustomed collar and black alpaca coat, that this little challenge was, if not justifiable, at least not imprudent.

"No. You see, I am not a ladies' man."

There was decided sarcasm, and a freedom from all embarrassment, in Matthew Dobson's answer.

And Mrs. Curtis, looking more closely at him, perceived a distinct frown on his face. Seeing this frown, she at once jumped to the conclusion that he was a man to be frightened of, since he could not be bullied, and accordingly changed her manner of address.

"Did you want to see the Consul on any business, Mr. Dobson?"

"No, thank you," he answered. "I came to see you, Mrs. Curtis, and to apologise for not having called on you a good many years ago."

This was evidently intended as a joke, but Mrs. Curtis received it in dead silence. The subject, or at any rate the present aspect of it, was no joking matter to her.

"I called on Mrs. Bradley yesterday," went on the visitor, "because she is the latest arrival. Your husband tells me, Mrs. Curtis, I did wrong. I ought to have called on you first. I apologise."

"Quite unnecessary, Mr. Dobson," said Mrs. Curtis, relaxing into her usual affable smile. "All the same, I ought to tell you that the majority of Consuls' wives wouldn't be quite so ready to accept your excuses. So——"

And here she looked up, and caught an expression lurking in the corner of Matthew Dobson's eye which made her rather repent that she hadn't looked up before she began to speak. The good-humour was gone, and Matthew Dobson's habitual look, as she knew it at race-meetings and such public gatherings as she had seen him at, was once more there,—a look, she had always thought, of defiant contempt for her sex, with a quickness to take offence at any word that might come within gunshot of wounding his self-love; the look of a porcupine, with all his fretful quills erect.

"Yes?"

Matthew Dobson's interrogation was a challenge for war. Mrs. Curtis, a coward at heart, was about to knuckle down at once, had in fact begun a stammering explanation of what she had *meant* to say, when Providence gave her a deliverer in the shape of Mrs. Bradley.

And she had the mortification, not only of being released from an uncomfortable situation by a woman whom she considered both ill-bred and mischievous—for of course Mrs. Curtis had taken as gospel-truth all the rumours that had preceded the Commissioner's wife to Foochow—but of noting that Matthew Dobson's face softened at once, that his voice was gentle and courteous, and that he was evidently at his ease with Mrs. Bradley.

At ease with such a woman! What volumes did that not say for Matthew Dobson! This, then, was the kind of woman he admired, he got on with! Mrs. Curtis's little nose almost curled in the air with contempt as she leaned back in her chair, and watched the latest arrival.

A tall, stout, red-faced lady, with a good sprinkling of powder to soften the natural colour of her complexion, wearing a dress of the brightest cornflower-blue, set off by a huge red feather fan, and sitting in the most ungraceful of attitudes; in an attitude that Mrs. Curtis would have been scandalised to see Annie assume.

And goodness alone knew what topic of conversation she was going to choose! It was with a genuine sigh of relief, for her own society's reputation, as well as for a possible truce to Mrs. Bradley's loud and cheerful voice, that Mrs. Curtis hailed the departure of Matthew Dobson.

"Did he invite you, Mrs. Curtis?" was Mrs. Bradley's question almost before the door had closed on the visitor.

"Who invite me to what?"

Alas for Mrs. Curtis's little failing—curiosity! She gave herself away entirely into the enemy's hand by this speech.

"*He* is Mr. Dobson, and the *what* is his house," cried Mrs. Bradley, laughing again. "He hadn't been ten minutes in my drawing-room yesterday before he gave me the free run of his place. A most charming man I call him. I was quite flattered—I told him so—that he had come to call on me. He's not a ladies' man, the Commissioner tells me. And yet I find him the very next afternoon calling on you! Does he call regularly, Mrs. Curtis?"

No, Mrs. Curtis was glad to say he didn't. He was not the kind of man the mother of a growing-up girl cared to have calling regularly.

"Ah! there I'm more fortunate than you!" laughed Mrs. Bradley again. "I have no growing-up girls, and only my own morals to look after. And I'm pretty safe, I think!"

"Possibly," Mrs. Curtis returned, in what she meant to be a sarcastic tone, but which only succeeded in sounding ludicrous from her mouth. "But I, you see, have my position in society to think of as well. And as long as Mr. Dobson lives in defiance, open defiance, of all proprieties, so long shall I not care to cultivate his friendship."

"If you judge all your acquaintance by such a strict rule, what a weeding-out you will have!"

The six laughed. They really could not help it. Or rather, five did. The sixth, a missionary, nodded approvingly at Mrs. Curtis.

"We will change the subject, and come to tea," the Consul's wife said stiffly. "When you have been here a little longer, Mrs. Bradley, you will perhaps understand Foochow ways a little better, and not—"

"If I live here a thousand years, which God forbid!" cried Mrs. Bradley, bringing down her fan with a thump on the table, "I shall never cut an agreeable and amusing acquaintance just because he doesn't look upon marriage with my own particular eyes. I hope I'm far too advanced to be so narrow-minded, bigoted—"

"Yes, yes." The Consul had come in, and caught the last few words. "What are you saying about bigotry, Mrs. Bradley? Accusing me, or the chaplain, of it, eh?"

"Men are not bigoted," Mrs. Bradley answered testily. "It was only your wife and I who were discussing—"

"Some one I vote we drop for the present," smiled Mrs. Curtis, suddenly herself again. "Milk and sugar, Mrs. Bradley?"

And by a few words dropped into her husband's ear as he came to fetch Mrs. Bradley's cup, Mrs. Curtis contrived that Matthew Dobson's name should be banished for the remainder of the afternoon.

But when the other ladies had gone, she accompanied the Commissioner's wife to the gate, by a roundabout way. And what she said to her then made Mrs. Bradley look, though not shocked nor horrified, at least eager and interested.

Indeed, Mrs. Bradley greeted Matthew Dobson, whom she met on his way to the Club, more warmly than ever, and insisted on his seeing her home and guarding her against imaginary Chinese dogs. And Mrs. Curtis always declared it was not his reception at the Consulate, but Mrs. Bradley's influence alone, that brought it about that Matthew Dobson paid no more afternoon visits to ladies.

CHAPTER II.

"And I was perfectly right, you see!" exclaimed Mrs. Curtis in triumph about a week after the memorable Working Party when Matthew Dobson had paid his call. "He *had* a motive for calling on me, the old fox! Perfectly shameful, I declare it was, to try to get round *me* with his calls! Most impertinent, I do declare!"

She had burst into her husband's dressing-room, where that worthy official, arrayed in an ancient kimono, was peacefully smoking his morning cigar after his bath, and reading the newspapers the steamer had just brought him.

Mr. Curtis was a nervous man, and his wife's irruption flustered him exceedingly. And so his voice was snappy as he asked,

"What do you mean by your wonderful alarms, Sarah? I wish you would speak in an ordinary tone of voice, not go in for these violent outbursts. You should have a little consideration for my tastes. Now, you know—"

"Oh yes!" Mrs. Curtis put in. "But wait till you've heard my news. You will be just as astonished and outraged as I am. Only just fancy—" Here she closed the door, which had hitherto been banging cheerfully in the morning breeze— "Fancy! Mr. Dobson has got out from England—I've no doubt by the

French mail, first-class—a girl, a Eurasian girl, his daughter, and she and a grand lady companion arrived this morning!"

Mr. Curtis sat bolt upright.

"No! you don't mean it! Dobson has a daughter, has he? Well, he's kept it precious dark all along. Then is that the mother he has just sent away?"

"Yes, this girl's mother. But the impudence of the whole transaction is what angers me most. To bring such a girl here, to pass her off as his daughter, and force her into our society! For of course that was what he meant by coming to call here last week. It was the thin end of the wedge. But he'll never get the thick end in with *me*, at any rate!" cried Mrs. Curtis triumphantly. "I leave that sort of thing to Mrs. Bradley!"

"His daughter!" repeated the Consul in a tone of bewilderment. "Are you sure it's his daughter, Sarah? Who told you?"

"Who *could* tell me?" asked Mrs. Curtis,—and a glance at her distinct undress supplied the answer at once.

"Amah told me. The Chinese know everything at once. Mr. Dobson went down to the steamer and brought her up. She's a girl of about seventeen, with at least six huge Saratoga trunks. I suppose she means to dress herself up in beads and feathers! Then there's a companion, an old lady with grey hair and spectacles, who seemed very frightened of the steamer coolies, and screamed when the chairs set off home. A pretty cavalcade, I've no doubt!" And Mrs. Curtis, having expended all her news, and having suddenly recollected there were possibly other details to be obtained from the amah, nodded to her husband, and went back to her own toilet.

This was indeed a piece of news, and very awkward news too, to Mr. Curtis. It quite spoiled any enjoyment of his cigar, and made him give himself extra cuts while shaving. His nerves were a trifle shaky, and so was his hand, at the best of times, doubtless owing simply to a long sojourn in China. He foresaw, with the

clear-sighted vision of a man who has been often through them, stormy times ahead. This was not the first port he had been in with a regular fire-eater of the Matthew Dobson type. Nor do officials always come off best in struggles with merchant-princes. And how he had congratulated himself, and been congratulated too, by less fortunate predecessors, on the friendly terms on which he had managed to keep with Matthew Dobson! A great deal was owing, he freely admitted, to his wife's tact and good taste in not resenting Matthew Dobson's failings as regarded herself. Mrs. Curtis had even arrived at bowing to him at the annual race-meeting—the race-meeting that was due in another fortnight! And now, what would——what could be the result of this unfortunate arrival?

Dobson's daughter was clearly impossible. As well as being on friendly terms with her father, Mr. Curtis was bound, even more bound, to be on friendly terms with the missionaries. Mrs. Curtis was hand in glove with them, beginning with the Bishop, to whom of course Matthew Dobson was worse than a heathen man and a publican. If the Consul took up the cause of the Dobsons, the missionaries would cut him. Whereas if he cut this Dobson girl, he must bid farewell to his before-dinner cocktail at the Club. Matthew Dobson would contrive to make that place too hot for him.

But here, having arrived at the lowest possible depth of despair, the Consul's spirits unaccountably began to rise again. Things needn't be so bad, after all. Very likely, in fact certainly, Matthew Dobson wouldn't try to force his daughter on any one. Why imagine evils before they came? Mr. Curtis was in quite a philosophical, *i.e.*, easy, frame of mind by the time the boy announced breakfast.

Nor could his wife's very Anglicised French sentences shake his peace of mind. Of course she spoke in French about the Dobson household before Annie, who in reality knew much more about the

new arrivals than her mother, having gleaned full particulars from the post-office coolie.

"There's nothing to be done, Sarah," he wound up his meal by saying, "The girl won't come in our way in the least. You won't know any more of her than if she had remained in England."

"I am not so sure of that," Mrs. Curtis answered, relapsing into her native tongue, "He will get some lady to take her up, and invite her to her house: some one he has got power over. Didn't you tell me the Crosses owed him Tls. 20,000?"

"If I did tell you, you had no business to repeat it!" said the Consul in a tone of deep irritation. "Annie, go away! Couldn't you see that child's mouth wide open, drinking in every word you said, Sarah? When will you learn to keep your mouth shut about my office secrets?"

And Mr. Curtis tramped out of the room and house in a decidedly ruffled humour. He had no confidence in his wife's discretion.

That virtuous and highly respectable lady, after giving a scolding to Annie about nothing in particular, by way of working off steam, was just about to make her daily raid into the cookhouse and yard, when a loud and cheery voice was heard calling her name in the front hall.

There stood Mrs. Bradley, arrayed in a gorgeous pink and yellow tea-gown, which evidently covered a most rudimentary summer morning toilette.

"I was obliged to come round to you, just as I was, dear Mrs. Curtis!" she cried, advancing into the dining-room. "I didn't know if you had heard this extraordinary bit of news: *Mr. Dobson has got a daughter come this morning*!"

Mrs. Bradley had lowered her voice to a hollow whisper as she brought out these words. She had evidently come expecting to impart real news, in the true sense of the word. Indeed, what was the good of being a Commissioner's wife if she did not hear

everything there was to be heard in the place before any one else? But Mrs. Curtis's face was unresponsive.

"Yes, so I have heard," she answered in a tone of indifference. "But really I didn't think it could concern me in the least, and so I attached no importance to the news."

"How did you hear?" enquired Mrs. Bradley. "I didn't think any one but the Commissioner and myself knew it. The whole affair has been kept such a profound mystery. Why, I was at Mr. Dobson's last night, and he never thought of mentioning it even to *me*!"

Mrs. Bradley's evident vexation at her news being stale was quite gratifying to behold.

"Oh, of course, we always get first intelligence of everything," remarked Mrs. Curtis in a casual tone. "I would rather ask, Mrs. Bradley, how *you* got it?"

"Oh, that's simple enough!" cried Mrs. Bradley cheerfully. "The steamer passenger-list always comes to the Custom House, and I make them bring it to me first. Well, when I saw "Miss Dobson," and "Miss Pointz," I naturally thought of our friend Matthew. So I sent off my No. 2 boy—that little fellow, you know—to find out at Mr. Dobson's. And he's just come back."

"Of course you can find out anything if you go to work!" said Mrs. Curtis, ironically. "But Mr. Curtis is very particular about my not questioning servants. There are some people who use their servants in such very strange ways, to find things out for them! But Mr. Curtis is almost foolish about what he calls 'pumping' people. And, as a consequence, perhaps—at least he says so—he knows everything before——"

"Ah yes! yes!" broke in Mrs. Bradley, who had paid not the slightest attention to what Mrs. Curtis had been saying, and so felt perfectly unruffled. "Why on earth did you make this into a dining-room, Mrs. Curtis? With a fresh colour on the walls—what

would you say to a dado too?—it would make a lovely boudoir. Excuse me; I must say at the moment what I've got on my mind, and your room struck me just then as so wasted. But I must be going!"

Mrs. Bradley gathered together the folds of her tea-gown, hastily securing a few of its hooks, and stood up to go.

"By the by, Mrs. Curtis," she said, pausing at the door, "I did want to know something. How do you propose to receive Miss Dobson? Shall you go and call on her, or wait till her father brings her to see you?"

"Her father brings her to see me! That he certainly won't do! cried Mrs. Curtis. "And if he does, I shall not be at home, of course! My dear Mrs. Bradley, what *can* you be thinking of?"

"Thinking of!" retorted Mrs. Bradley. "I'm thinking of what is the most likely thing to happen. It would be very hard indeed on this girl, in my opinion, if she is a decent sort of girl, that she should be cut, and ignored, and treated as dirt by every one,—because of what? Simply because her mother is a Chinawoman, and not married to her father!"

"Mrs. Bradley!"—Mrs. Curtis's voice was low, but firm—"You are, I know, what people call advanced. I am old-fashioned, and pride myself on being womanly. As a woman, as the mother of a family, and as a Consul's wife, I cannot, I dare not, recognise viciousness. Mr. Dobson is, and has been a vicious man. This girl is the living proof of it. And she's got to suffer for her father's sin. The Bible gives us the authority for saying so!"

Mrs. Curtis paused, triumphantly. It had been a grand speech, one which would distinctly bear repetition, and addition too. Mrs. Bradley, freethinker, church-neglecter though she was, would assuredly be annihilated. But no!

"I thank my Maker!" cried Mrs. Bradley, a subtle provincial touch modulating her accents, "that I don't belong to *your* school of thought! The ways of the Foochow people, their upper and their

lower circles of society, their visitable and unvisitable people, are detestable! To set oneself against a wretched girl before even knowing what she is like! It's monstrous! If this is Foochow Christianity, may I not go to heaven along with you all!"

"That's quite your affair," said Mrs. Curtis, stiffly. Mrs. Bradley was getting hot and angry, which put her at once at a disadvantage.

"Well, if you don't mean to do the right thing, I will. I'll go and call to-day, and I've a good mind to invite her straight away, just to shame the Foochow people!" cried Mrs. Bradley, opening the door with a sound resembling a snort.

"Invite her as much as you please, Mrs. Bradley. Only, don't invite me or my daughter to meet her."

To this, delivered with a friendly nod of the head, Mrs. Bradley, half-way down the hall, vouchsafed no answer. And Mrs. Curtis called Annie to her lessons with the self-satisfied air of one who has scored completely over an adversary.

CHAPTER III.

Mrs. Bradley was succeeding beyond her wildest dreams. She was turning Foochow completely upside down. The lowly were being exalted, and the high were being brought low.

None of your snobbish distinctions between the Indoor and the Outdoor staff for Mrs. Bradley. Her society was composed of individuals, chosen for their own personalities. This was one of the main articles of her social creed. Indeed, it came next after the very first, which was that Mrs. Bradley's personal likes and dislikes were the criterion by which she judged of every one else. It is scarcely necessary here to note that these same likes and dislikes were not framed after the fashion of the laws of the Medes and Persians.

Surely Foochow had never held a woman more absolutely, more triumphantly right, in her opposition to obstinate, pig-headed, antiquated notions, than was Mrs. Bradley as she swooped down on Respectability and Good Tone in the form of Mrs. Curtis's Working Party on the afternoon of the day Matthew's daughter arrived. Her experiences of her visit at Mr. Dobson's house, which were readily imparted to Mrs. Curtis's guests, to the utter disgust of their hostess, were somewhat as follows :—

About 4 p.m. she had started off to call on Miss Dobson. Well, that mightn't be her real name—with a look towards Mrs. Curtis—

but it was near enough. And she had found her at home, of course. Matthew Dobson, a trifle nervous, she had noticed at once, had greeted her with great warmth at the door. She had been taken into a room which had evidently just been fitted up for his daughter. It was a very pretty sitting-room, with some simply priceless pieces of *cloisonné* and "old blue" standing about. [Here Mrs. Bradley entered into a minute description of the elegancies of the furniture, etc.] Then Miss Dobson had come in, and had been introduced as "Sacha."

"Sacha?" queried the missionary's wife, interested against her better judgment. "Is that a Chinese name? I never heard of it in Europe."

"Oh yes, I've heard it before," answered Mrs. Bradley, who made a point of never admitting that anything was new to her. "It is out of some old legend, I think, only I forget which one at this moment. At any rate, Sacha Dobson is quite as pretty as though she had just stepped out of a picture-frame!"

"I never yet saw a pretty Eurasian," said Mrs. Curtis, contemptuously, "I never could see any beauty in a flat nose, slanting eyes, and hair like a rope. I admire fine, silky hair myself!"

"Well, you would scarcely believe it," Mrs. Bradley went on, addressing herself (much to that lady's confusion) exclusively to the missionary's wife, "but this girl is a perfect Spanish beauty. Just the tiniest, archest tilt to the eyes, just the colour of the hair and eyes—perhaps just a trifle of width to the nose—that is all she has Chinese about her. A girl I shouldn't be ashamed to be seen with anywhere, even in Hong Kong or Shanghai!"

And hereupon Mrs. Bradley launched forth upon the simplicity, the perfection of Sacha's manner. She had evidently moved in the very best of society at home. She had spoken of her "Aunt Mary," by whom she meant, according to Matthew Dobson, his own sister. And, finally, the companion, or governess, Miss Pointz, had been presented for Mrs. Bradley's inspection and approval.

"And I didn't approve of her at all!" remarked the candid Mrs. Bradley. "Of course I couldn't say so; but I should think she would be a fearful bore to them both. Such a prudish, prim, little old maid, with spectacles, black alpaca dress, and genteel air! A perfect horror, my dear Mrs. Curtis, a perfect horror! Why, she'll be so proper she won't allow that poor Sacha a scrap of liberty! A regular duenna she is! I think I shall advise Mr. Dobson to get rid of her as soon as he can."

"If I were you, I shouldn't interfere in *that* household!" remarked Mrs. Curtis, incautiously. Bitterly she repented her indiscretion a few minutes later, when Mrs. Bradley turned on her and metaphorically rent her, accusing her in no measured terms of want of charity, of narrow-mindedness, and all the sundry great and small Foochow social vices the Commissioner's wife so particularly held in abhorrence.

Now Mrs. Bradley had already two days before gone half way to offending the principal merchant's wife by inviting her to meet an Assistant Examiner at dinner, and by asking her to accompany this same out-of-society man in a song, to the mutual confusion of both parties concerned. This "insult" had been the topic of conversation previous to Mrs. Bradley's arrival, and the wronged tea-merchant's wife now came gallantly to Mrs. Curtis's rescue.

"There is no denying," she said in a dignified, quiet voice, which somehow drowned the loud rushing sound of Mrs. Bradley's discourse, "that we all agree with Mrs. Curtis. We know, we feel we are right, though we can't prove it to you. By all means, if you find Mr. Dobson's daughter *useful* to you—there was a slight tinge of bitterness here—cultivate her. We don't require any such help to make *our* parties go off well!"

"Perhaps that's the reason they don't go off well!" laughed Mrs. Bradley with unshaken good humour. "I've always heard, even so far away as Canton, what a dead-alive place Foochow

was! And yet there are plenty of people here. I never hit on the reason before!"

Pale with rage, the merchant's wife now remained speechless. For, after all, Mrs. Bradley was the Commissioner's wife, and to have the Commissioner your enemy does not suit a steamer-agent, nor the head of a hong—any one, in fact, but a Consul. Only, was it possible for people, however much it might be their interest to do so, to keep friends with Mrs. Bradley?

But the ladies were not to be put to the test any more that afternoon. Mrs. Bradley suddenly remembered she had engaged to meet one of the Customs' assistants on the Race-Course at 5.30, and it was nearly six o'clock then. So, after affectionately embracing "dear" Mrs. Curtis, much to that lady's disgust, and disturbing all the servants to find her chair-coolies—whom after all she had sent home—the Commissioner's wife departed.

And the ruffled ladies smoothed each other by tearing her dress, character, and actions ruthlessly to pieces.

CHAPTER IV.

Mrs. Bradley was perfectly right. Matthew Dobson was living a life of agonising nervousness.

He had never thought much, if anything, about Sacha while she was small. In those days he had been clerk in a very large firm, in charge of a branch in Formosa. The firm had failed, but out of its ruins many new firms had arisen. One was Matthew Dobson's, and it had taken up its head-quarters in Foochow.

But when he left Formosa, Matthew had sent the little Sacha, aged four, home to his maiden sister in England. She, not knowing who the child's mother was, and having the most hazy ideas of everything and every place to the east of Paris, had from the first looked upon her niece as a lineal descendant, on the mother's side, from some great Oriental potentate, such as the Lama of Tibet, Prince Tao-t'ai, or some of those wonderful Chinese personages that figure in the pages of *Tit-Bits*, or even higher-class periodicals. And in this belief, which was strengthened by Matthew Dobson's persistent silence in answer to all her queries, Miss Dobson senior had always remained. Further, she had lost no opportunity of impressing this creed on every one around Sacha, beginning with the child herself. When she was very young, it was Sacha's nurse who was instructed to treat with

proper reverence the little Princess. As she grew older, it was her schoolmistress and her schoolfellows who had followed in the same train. And thus it came about that Sacha Dobson reached the age of sixteen in the firm belief that she was a greater personage than any of her acquaintances, that her word was law, her wishes commands, and that a brilliant future awaited her in that mysterious East from which she had come.

And then, when she was sixteen years old, her father came home. Of course not with the Princess her mother, popularly believed to have died at Sacha's birth. Quite by himself, quite unexpectedly he came, rather to his sister's disappointment, who had looked for a Jos Sedley, with a magnificent retinue laden with umbrellas, gongs and presents into the bargain. But after all, perhaps it was more distinguished, though not so overwhelming to one's neighbours in a remote country-town, to come as he came. On his side, Matthew Dobson found his little brown imp of a child, all eyes, mud, and life, transformed into a handsome, fat, sleepy-eyed girl of sixteen, who looked at least five years older, and betrayed no surprise nor pleasure at his arrival. How on earth was she to, after having been separated from him for twelve years? Sacha simply accepted his presents and attentions as though they came from an inferior, certainly not from a father.

Matthew Dobson was annoyed, with an annoyance that almost got the better of his admiration for his daughter's looks. He had come home fully resolved to take her out with him again; and he did not do so. He made up his mind her education was not completed,—Sacha's ignorance, by the way, was equalled only by her laziness,—and so he left her behind to follow him in two years' time.

But Miss Mary Dobson died about three months after her brother started for China, and so under the guardianship of Miss Pointz, an intimate friend of the vicar, Sacha came out to her father just after her seventeenth birthday.

And Matthew Dobson, after much mature deliberation, decided that it would never, never do for Sacha to meet or to know her mother, who had formed part of the Dobson household for the last twenty years. Far better let her continue in the belief she had always held, that her mother was dead. Of course, this matter was easily arranged. Then, his household once set in order, Matthew Dobson began to be tormented as to his social duties as regarded his daughter. Clearly, he had been wrong in studiously avoiding ladies' society. It would not do to launch Sacha amidst a throng of clerks, tea-tasters, Customs' assistants, even elderly bachelors of his own standing. He had been morally obliged to furnish her with a duenna. But a girl, a young thing like that, would want amusement; ladies always seemed to want lady-friends. And it was with this motive alone, which he meant to disclose did the ladies receive him kindly, that Matthew Dobson paid those two memorable visits.

Certainly it was unfortunate—he mused to himself a few days after Sacha's arrival, while his daughter was lying on a long chair in her verandah upstairs, lazily reading herself to sleep, and Miss Pointz was filling, in a fine Italian hand, sheets of the thinnest foreign paper with utterly illegible descriptions of her experiences—it was unfortunate that his *hong* happened to be in Foochow. The women of the place were an insufferable set of snobs. All of them, of course, except Mrs. Bradley. And she was not much more desirable as an acquaintance than the rest.

Mrs. Curtis and her friends had, one and all, refused even to acknowledge the existence of his Sacha. This fact had been absolutely thrust upon Matthew, who had felt it his duty, as well as his pride, to parade his daughter without much delay on the Race-course, where every evening the fashionables of Foochow were wont to congregate, and which was now carefully railed round in preparation for the coming races. Luckily Miss Pointz was not with them on that occasion, that worthy lady being

prostrated by a severe bilious attack following on the well-known "China appetite." And Matthew persuaded himself easily that Sacha did not know enough of life to be astonished at the blank stare with which one lady greeted their appearance, or the hurried way in which Mrs. Curtis turned aside her head and began explaining something very audibly to her little girl when he passed the Consular group. No, Sacha was quite content to walk along by her father's side, hanging on his arm ; more than satisfied with the admiring glances of some half-a-dozen young clerks, who only awaited Mrs. Curtis's departure to beg for an introduction to her. But Mrs. Curtis held the field, and there were only the least desirable people who braved public opinion, and came up to join the Dobsons.

Matthew Dobson, inwardly boiling with impotent rage, was almost thinking of going home again, when Mrs. Bradley, arrayed in the full glory of her cornflower-blue dress, appeared upon the scene. That changed the face of affairs. The Curtis party wavered, and broke up. The wives of the Customs' Assistants discovered, after a few words with the advancing Commissioner's wife, that it was the children's bedtime. The younger Assistants joined their chief's wife in her progress. And Mrs. Curtis and Annie, to save themselves from being swept off their feet and made to join in the tide that was rolling over towards the Dobsons, left the Race-course to the enemy.

But after all, when he turned over in his mind the various sensations through which he had passed that evening, Matthew Dobson was not quite satisfied with the turn things had taken after Mrs. Bradley's appearance. Of course, it is doubtful whether the tact of an angel from heaven would have satisfied him. Mrs. Bradley had greeted him and his daughter with an effusion which seemed to him to savour of patronage. Patronage shewn to Matthew Dobson, forsooth ! The young men had treated Sacha too familiarly ; the elder ones had offended even more in this respect.

And Sacha? Well, he could find no fault with her. She was superior, his little girl, in every way to any European woman he had ever seen or known.

No, he was glad she wasn't more grown-up, and was after all such a child. Her imperiousness, her selfish little ways, delighted him. A woman ought to be greedy, and lazy. Not to excess, of course. But Heaven defend him from a strong-minded daughter! There was no use in being too sharp, and finding out slights and petty discourtesies. Matthew was glad Sacha had inherited none of his own sensitiveness, that sensitiveness which had after all been the real cause of his hatred and fear of women, and which was now poisoning some of the purest joy it had ever been his fate to possess.

Perhaps it was a good thing the women had made up their minds to leave her alone. They might only have succeeded in making her artificial, or in wounding her self-love. Neither of which would it ever enter into Mrs. Bradley's head for one moment to do. She, the Commissioner's wife was natural to a fault, and Sacha would only receive kindnesses, Matthew was sure, from her hands. And as for Mrs. Bradley's laxity in social morality, why, he, Sacha's father, would take good care to guard her against that.

And so he made no scruple, scarcely asked it as a favour of Mrs. Bradley, that she should chaperone Sacha and Miss Pointz to the Races on the Tuesday following.

CHAPTER V.

"Best bibs and tuckers, eh, Sacha?" laughed Matthew with an admiring laugh on Tuesday morning. "Got up to kill, little one? Take care of her, Miss Pointz, and don't let her flirt too much!"

Miss Pointz looked up in great alarm.

"I hope Sacha will never forget herself, and what is due to her, so as to flirt," said the duenna, nervously scratching up from her lap a few stray crumbs, and flinging them on to the table. "It is such a vulgar thing to flirt!"

To call a thing "vulgar" was with Miss Pointz synonymous with worthy of penal servitude for life. But of course Matthew Dobson did not know this.

"Vulgar is it?" he went on. "I don't mind a little vulgarity myself. What say you, Sacha?"

"I don't know," Sacha answered absently. She was fully occupied in trying to eat a mango so as to combine Miss Pointz's elegant turn of the wrist with real enjoyment of the fruit itself.

"If, Mr. Dobson," Miss Pointz said in a dignified manner, "you like vulgarity, I fear I must 'umbly beg to differ entirely from you."

Miss Pointz was very particular about the pronunciation of the word 'umble, and took every opportunity of introducing it into conversation.

"Indeed! why that's a pity!" cried Matthew Dobson cheerfully. He could not resist the old schoolboy sensation of poking fun at this prim old maid.

Luckily for Miss Pointz's peace of mind, the master of the house was here called away, and she did not see him again till he came to conduct Sacha and herself to the Grand Stand on the Race-course.

This same morning Mrs. Curtis had had a somewhat severe shock to her nerves. She had been sitting in her bedroom, hearing Annie repeat a speech she was to make that day, when, totally unannounced, her eldest son, Harry, had walked into her room.

Harry Curtis was three-and-twenty, and a 4th Assistant (B) in the Customs. It had hitherto been his mother's constant complaint that her son had been stationed in the most out-of-the-way, unhealthy ports, and she had often hinted that some personal grudge was at the bottom of this persistent neglect. Of course, she had always wanted Harry to be stationed in Foochow. That is, always before Mrs. Bradley's arrival. And now, with the usual irony of fate, Mrs. Curtis found her wishes fulfilled, and her son suddenly, at a moment's notice, transferred to Foochow!

The lad himself, however, was so delighted to be there, and in such spirits at having arrived just in time for the Races, that Mrs. Curtis began to forget, or at any rate to look calmly on, coming possibilities of trouble. Of course Harry could not quarrel with his Commissioner's wife; nor could she, his mother, either, for Harry's sake. It was indeed a lucky thing that she was still on good terms with Mrs. Bradley. It would be easy to keep on a civil footing with her, though they could never be real friends. Easy,—that is if Mrs. Bradley did not force her into enmity by leading Harry into some mischief or other! Mrs. Curtis's

confidence in her son's discretion was unfortunately not great, and Foochow was after all a dangerous place to live in.

And here was a dangerous person, the Consul's wife mused, as from her seat in the Grand Stand she saw the Dobson chair-coolies' livery appear on the scene.

The wooden shed, furnished with somewhat dilapidated cane chairs, that was dignified by this name, was nearly full of brilliantly dressed ladies. This was Miss Pointz's first appearance in public, and her very smartest gown—which, by the way, she had not put on, judging it suitable only for Church—would have paled in its glories beside the very plainest dressed woman she now saw. Soft pinks, elegant silks, rich satins, passed in a bewildering maze before her eyes. Sacha's dress, which she had thought far too smart, was only a simple girl's toilette after all. And, towering above the other ladies, in height as in situation, sat the most gorgeously arrayed of all, Mrs. Bradley, who welcomed them as soon as they came in sight; certainly before they came within hearing.

"Mr. Curtis, go and fetch them up to me!"

Harry Curtis, as in duty bound, was of course in attendance on the Commissioner's wife.

As Mrs. Bradley gave this command, she glanced with assumed indifference towards Mrs. Curtis, who had surrounded herself with an imposing group of magnificently attired females.

The Consul's wife pretended to be deaf, and blind too, to the approaching trio. But she took a good look at Miss Pointz as that little lady, half tripping over her dress, made her way up to Mrs. Bradley.

Matthew Dobson did not follow them. He could not perhaps trust himself to stand by and watch their reception. Or perhaps he was altogether engrossed with the races, and his bets on the various ponies. At any rate he turned aside into the weighing enclosure, and left the women to fight it out amongst themselves.

But the jockeys, and all his other friends, found him strangely absent-minded. He kept on walking out of the weighing and saddling shed, and looking with an anxiety he could not disguise in the direction of the Grand Stand. Mrs. Bradley's loud laugh, which was distinctly audible within the shed, seemed invariably to draw him out from its shelter. The silences, too, that alternated with that laugh, had the very same effect. Indeed, so absorbed was Matthew in things strictly outside racing proper, that he totally ignored Mr. Cross's awkward attempts to engage him in a friendly conversation. From which circumstance that worthy debtor jumped to the conclusion that Dobson was offended because his (Mr. Cross's) wife had not called upon "that girl," and determined to remedy the mistake before his creditor called for payment.

But it was Sacha, of course, who was filling her father's mind with anxiety. What broad wit was Mrs. Bradley indulging in? What scrape could she be leading the girl into? Or again (this after one of those silences) what mischief had Mrs. Curtis managed to make?

No, Sacha was all right, sitting by Mrs. Bradley. Quite in the corner, it was true, but still safe. Where was Miss Pointz, though? Oh, only in the row below. But Mrs. Bradley had no business to beckon up that young tide-waiter, and set him talking to Sacha? She was not to associate with the Outdoor Staff! And then, what business had she, Mrs. Bradley, to bring up those little black-and-tan children of that assistant examiner! As Steward of the Race-course (of course not as Sacha's father) Matthew Dobson felt the incongruity of the affair. Such distinctly Chinese children! There! Sacha was actually talking to one! Before he knew it, Matthew Dobson had gone half way across the enclosure to remonstrate on this infringement of an unwritten law. And then he suddenly recollected that, in Mrs. Curtis's eyes at any rate, Sacha's presence was quite as unlawful as that of those three little Eurasians.

"You're not on it, to-day, Dobson!" said the Consul, slapping him on the back. "Come and have a drink!"

Now the Consul was strictly forbidden by his wife to "have any drinks." They didn't suit him. But every day is not a Race day, and so Mr. Curtis had already had several drinks, which drinks, of course, had only made him more thirsty. Besides, he had seen Sacha Dobson for the first time, and had been especially struck by her good looks. And he wisely judged Matthew Dobson would not object to hearing his (Mr. Curtis's) opinion of his daughter.

In fact, he made himself so agreeable to Matthew that they had not only one, but two, drinks together, the chits being signed by Matthew, as the Consul had already exceeded the amount he cared to account for to his wife. And when they left the bar the Grand Stand was empty. The ladies had gone to lunch at the Commissioner's, who that day was keeping open house.

Never, so long as he lived, was Matthew Dobson to know how much those drinks had cost him.

Miss Pointz, abandoned on a lower row of chairs, had, after vainly trying by impressive coughs and clears of the throat to direct Sacha's attention to herself, taken to studying the lowest row in the Grand Stand, occupied by Mrs. Curtis and her friends. Mrs. Curtis's eyes, in travelling up to the Bradley row, by necessity encountered those of the deserted Miss Pointz. As a public personage Mrs. Curtis was of course bound to bow to the stranger. Miss Pointz returned the salutation with eagerness. And in a few minutes Annie Curtis, charged with a message, came up to the forlorn spinster.

"Mamma says there is an empty chair near her, where you can see the Races much better than from where you are now. Will you come?"

And Miss Pointz obeyed with alacrity.

It has been already said that Mrs. Curtis was good-natured and friendly with all. Of course this means, only so long as nobody interfered with her to any serious extent. No one on the China coast would have dreamt of contradicting this statement by pointing out that she was not particularly friendly with Mrs. Bradley. To quarrel with Mrs. Bradley did not touch any one's character nearly as much as being friends with her did. Still, it is to be questioned whether Mrs. Curtis and Mrs. Bradley would not have remained on a "dear" footing, had it not been for the appearance of young Harry Curtis on the scene.

When Mrs. Curtis, with the quick and jealous eye of a mother, saw her boy dragged into the circle where Sacha Dobson shone, she was naturally alarmed. The lad was so childish, such a perfect schoolboy! And Mrs. Bradley so clever, so intriguing! Mrs. Curtis sniffed danger at once. Nor did Sacha's appearance and get-up re-assure her. The young lady was looking her very best, and, wide-awake for a marvel, was making herself excessively charming. From his earliest days Harry had always adored and admired women. His mother, who had been hoping he had grown out of that frame of mind, realised with horror that he was as hopeless now as in the days when, a lad of fifteen, he had thrown the whole household into consternation by announcing that in future years he intended to marry his little sister's nurse, a young woman specially selected for future exportation to China on account of an ugliness which had even appalled her own mother.

The more Mrs. Curtis looked, and watched, the more convinced she became that a deep-laid plot to ruin her own happiness, through corrupting her son, was being hatched by Mrs. Bradley and the Dobsons. If Mrs. Cross, on whom her husband had been impressing the necessity of avoiding any open insult to Matthew Dobson, had not been so worried herself, she could hardly have failed to notice Mrs. Curtis's annoyance. Even the fact that Annie was to give away the Ladies' Purse, to which

of course the Dobsons had been made to subscribe, could not console her. And this in spite of the fact that Matthew would undoubtedly resent the slight put upon his handsome daughter, who as latest arrival ought, and most likely would, but for Mrs. Curtis's influence, have been the heroine of the hour. Yet after all, to give away the Ladies' Purse was a passing honour, to be forgotten in a month. Whereas a flirtation between this Dobson girl and the Consul's son, there was no telling where it might end. Harry couldn't flirt, he always took things so seriously!

Mrs. Curtis began to feel that any means would be justifiable in her hands to prevent such an awful end. But what means had she in her power? How could she, without seriously injuring Harry's prospects in the Customs' service set him at enmity with his Commissioner's wife? Mrs. Curtis had heard of the power of secret reports, and of the blasted careers of those unfortunates who had not cut their coats according to their Commissioners' cloth. And then her eye fell upon Miss Pointz, sitting with a face dying of offence, deserted by Sacha, ignored by Mrs. Bradley. And, without arguing out the matter, the Consul's wife instinctively felt that here was an ally to be cultivated.

For the rest of the day Miss Pointz never quitted Mrs. Curtis's side. No, not even for tiffin, when Mrs. Curtis insisted that, "as the stranger," she must occupy one of the chief seats, though by so doing she could not keep her eye on Harry and Sacha, who, by Mrs. Bradley's order, had been relegated to a small side-table by themselves. Sounds of laughter came almost without ceasing from that end of the room, adding fuel to Mrs. Curtis's already flaming fire of wrath. And a final parade of the two, arm-in-arm, down the length of the dining-room, finally decided the anxious mother to make a friend and *confidante* of the beaming Miss Pointz.

But the task of enlightening Miss Pointz as to the shocking immorals of the household of which she was part proved to be no

easy one. The excellent companion was exceedingly obtuse, not to say stupid, in grasping innuendoes ; and sentences which to any enlightened China hand would have been clear as daylight were evidently perfectly unintelligible to her. When venturing out of the realm of hints, Mrs. Curtis announced that there were but eight annas to the rupee in "that girl," she found Miss Pointz equally deficient in numismatics. So that, finally, she was reduced to placing the whole situation in reference to Mr. Dobson's domestic arrangements in the baldest Saxon before the astonished Miss Pointz.

They were quite by themselves when the revelation took place. The elder gentlemen, and with them Matthew Dobson, were all at tiffin. The young people were strolling about below the Grand Stand. Mrs. Curtis's friends were resting in Mrs. Bradley's shady drawing-room until the officials of the Race-course should condescend to ordain the resumption of the day's business.

"But her mother was a princess!" exclaimed Miss Pointz, clutching eagerly at a passing straw of hope. "Every one knows that!"

"*What?*" Mrs. Curtis's voice rose almost to a shriek. "You don't mean to say they've told you *that?*"

"No, not exactly," Miss Pointz interrupted hastily. "But it was well-known ; every one in England knew it. In fact I've always heard that the poor woman died at her daughter's birth."

"Whoever told you that told you a falsehood, then!" retorted Mrs. Curtis. "Why, Mrs. Cross here (that lady just then appearing on the scene) can tell you as well as I that, far from being a Princess,—a Princess, my dear, they told Miss Pointz Sacha's mother was!—she was just what I have told you, and is alive now!"

Poor Mrs. Cross, thus appealed to, sorely repented she had ever left Mrs. Bradley's drawing-room. For, considering that she in all probability, would have to go and call on Sacha before long,

it was most unpleasant, to say the least, that a member of the Dobson household should know she was aware of the secret of Sacha's birth. She absolutely frowned on Mrs. Curtis.

In vain. Mrs. Curtis had just caught sight of Sacha pinning a buttonhole on to Harry Curtis's coat under the direct superintendence of Mrs. Bradley. What mother would be proof against such a spectacle?

"I can't believe it! Excuse me, Mrs. Curtis, I don't mean to say I doubt your word. But it seems incredible to me that a gentleman like Mr. Dobson could so cruelly deceive a poor helpless orphan like myself!"

As Miss Pointz would scarcely see forty again, the "orphan" plea was perhaps somewhat far-fetched. Still, she was evidently helpless, and Mrs. Curtis looked at her with a pity that would have been quite genuine had she not been obliged to retain a good part of her limited supply of that quality for herself.

"My dear Miss Pointz," she said, "Mr. Dobson is, I am sorry to say, an atheist as well as—" the blank was filled up with significant nods. "Now I do not mean to throw any doubts on Mr. Dobson. Far from it, I believe him to be a strictly honourable man. But, I put it to you yourself: Where can a man be without religion, who has no fear of God before his eyes?"

Miss Pointz was turning green with horror.

"An atheist too!"

The poor elderly spinster indeed felt she had been cajoled into a Gomorrha, and without a Zoar to escape to.

"But last Sunday, when I was too unwell to go to church he went there with Sacha himself!"

Miss Pointz in her despair was taking up the cudgels for her employer.

"Did he, indeed?" enquired Mrs. Curtis eagerly. Truth to tell, she had herself been absent that last Sunday, it being the only morning when the tailor was at liberty to try on her Race-dress.

"Then, if he went last Sunday, it was for the first time in his life!"

This Miss Pointz was of course not in a position to dispute Indeed, she felt not the slightest disposition to defend Matthew Dobson, of whom she stood in mortal fear. A fear, moreover, daily renewed and increased by his voice swearing at his servants all over the house, or grumbling at his food at meals. For Sacha's father, never having been accustomed to control his feelings in years past, had not been altogether able to govern his temper during the whole fortnight Miss Pointz had lived under his roof. And, without drawing on her imagination, the portrait of Matthew Dobson presented by Mrs. Curtis was not calculated to cheer the spinster, who was under a three years' agreement to watch over Sacha.

The ladies were streaming into the Grand Stand now, and Mrs. Curtis got carried away and separated from Miss Pointz. The Consul's wife was not sorry for this interruption, since it was high time she looked after Harry, now that Miss Pointz thoroughly understood the footing on which the Dobsons were tolerated in Foochow. The good seed had been sown, and only wanted a little time to spring up in the companion's heart. But in another part of her vineyard there was a danger even more pressing and more urgently calling for attention. For Mrs. Bradley was one against whom she might not openly fight, and her weapons were: a pretty girl and a foolish boy.

CHAPTER VI.

Tired though she was, Miss Pointz wrote a long letter to England that evening.

It was addressed to the vicar of her parish, for whom she entertained a hopeless passion. And it detailed, in language as veiled as she could make it, Mrs. Curtis's information of that afternoon.

Of course Miss Pointz's first inclination had been to seek an interview with her employer, and throw up her situation on the spot. If challenged for a reason, she would naturally give him her reason: that she could not remain under the same roof with such a father and such a daughter. But worldly wisdom, and the space of time which necessarily elapsed before she had an opportunity of speaking, brought a change of mind. In the first place, she had come out under a three years' agreement, which bound her to remain where she was during that time, or, in case of not fulfilling her engagement, repaying to Matthew Dobson her passage out, plus the sum of £50, one year's salary. This was, of course, quite beyond Miss Pointz's means to do. Further, it was exceedingly doubtful whether she could find another situation at once in China. Judging by Foochow, there were very few children in the East. And if she could not get another situation, where was her passage-money home to come from?

A victim to false representations, for uncorrected impressions may well rank as such, Miss Pointz undoubtedly was. Of course she might reasonably claim the benefit of Mrs. Curtis's advice, but instinct warned her not to seek that priceless treasure. It is so easy to give another person advice, even if that advice involves loss of bread, butter and shelter to the enquirer, when one's own food and clothing are assured. Fortune had not frowned on Miss Pointz for naught; it had taught her a few lessons. And the first one she resolved to put in practice was: not to leave a substance for a shadow.

There was, too, another clause in the agreement of which she might very possibly reap the advantage. It ran to this effect, that, should Matthew Dobson find he had no further need of Miss Pointz's services before the expiration of the three years, he, in case of dismissing her, should provide her with the passage-money home.

And so Miss Pointz made up her mind, even while she was asking the vicar's advice, to either force Matthew Dobson to dismiss her, or to patiently await the termination of her agreement in a natural way.

But though she was, so to speak, obliged to remain under this sinner's roof and eat of his table, Miss Pointz felt she was no longer bound to treat either himself or his daughter with courtesy. Greatly to Sacha's astonishment, from the day of the Races forward the companion's manner entirely changed towards her. Easy-going, good-natured Sacha was bewildered at first at this extraordinary transformation of one of the meekest, smoothest-tongued, most obsequious of duennas into an irritable, spiteful old maid. The misfortune was, that Miss Pointz could not systematically carry out what she firmly believed was only self-vindication. When she had said something meant to be crushing, and which only failed to be cruel because of Sacha's utter ignorance of the fatal knowledge Miss Pointz possessed, the little companion, who after all had a

conscience, would feel it prick her and, stealing a side-look at Sacha, would suddenly become overwhelmed with remorse at having taken such advantage of the pretty and hopelessly incapable girl gazing at her in astonishment. Those were dangerous moments for Sacha's complacency of mind. Miss Pointz was then nearly in the act of confessing everything she knew. But there are some matters on which society has forbidden spinsters, even of an uncertain age, to speak freely. And Miss Pointz was a slave to society.

As for her manner to Matthew Dobson, try as she might, she could not alter it. He electrified her with fear, paralysed her voice, and reduced her to a cringing silence. And all this by his mere personality. Her hand shook so violently at meal-times, when alone she saw him, that the boy, conjecturing she needed internal applications to keep up her spirits, constantly replenished her glass. As soon as she could, she escaped to her own room. There, indeed, she spent the best part of the day, until it was cool enough to take a solitary walk on the Race-course. On the Race-course she would be sure to meet Mrs. Curtis, and to be treated as one lady is usually treated by another.

Sacha never accompanied her on these walks. Indeed, if Sacha had had her own way, she would never have walked at all. She had all the Oriental's hatred of movement, and could only be coaxed out of doors by her father, and then only to walk a short distance with him, or to go across to Mrs. Bradley's.

The Commissioner's wife had taken Sacha up violently; perhaps all the more because she realised that her Wednesday receptions were dwindling away. Sacha had a voice; that is she could sing fairly in tune. Mrs. Bradley proposed to teach her to sing. Sacha talked French, after the orthodox schoolgirl fashion. Mrs. Bradley offered to help her along in that language. Here it was indeed a case of the blind leading the blind, but Matthew Dobson did not know this, and only felt grateful for the help

Mrs. Bradley was giving him with his daughter. And so it came about that every other day Matthew Dobson took Sacha round to Mrs. Bradley's, for he would not have dreamed of letting her walk there by herself, and immolated himself with cheerfulness on the altar of paternal duty. And Mrs. Bradley and Sacha sang "*What are the wild waves saying?*" or "*I would that my love*" until Mr. Bradley, a really musical soul, who had been vainly endeavouring to be deaf in the solitude of his own study, came in and took Matthew round to the Club, Mrs. Bradley faithfully promising to see Sacha home herself.

Which she generally did, in the person of Harry Curtis. But neither Matthew Dobson nor Mrs. Curtis, nor the Commissioner, nor the Consul, heard of this arrangement.

Still, in spite of the Customs' patronage, as the summer wore away, and month after month passed, and no one but Mrs. Bradley seemed to care that his Sacha was alive, a great bitterness against Foochow and its people grew up in Matthew Dobson. Had he not been systematically kind, straight-dealing and honourable to all? How came it about that all his acquaintances were snobs and sneaks? Why did they speak fair to him in the Club, and go about and insult him, in the person of his daughter, out of it? This was the abode of mean, low curs, and he would get out of it as soon as possible. Not this year; times were too bad. But in about two years more, then he would throw up China and go and live on the Continent, in some warm and sunny place in Italy. There Sacha should marry some Duke, and they would all be together for the rest of their lives. Two years, that was no time, and Sacha was well enough satisfied with Foochow as it was. She didn't care for any one, and no one cared for her. So much the better; for he wouldn't have let her marry any one in Foochow, not if they went down on their knees to beg him to do so.

And in judging as he did of his daughter's whole-heartedness. Matthew Dobson was nearer the truth than was Mrs. Bradley herself,

CHAPTER VII.

The heat had passed, and a perfectly beautiful, rainless autumn had set in.

Just the weather for up-country expeditions, in those roomy, lofty, comfortable houseboats that are the envy of low-bridged Shanghai. Just cool enough to make a blanket pleasant at night, and to make the singing of mosquitoes a harmless droning accompaniment. A China autumn is, in fact, the time when a man, full of contentment at his own lot, begins to feel doubtful whether after all mosquitoes, those curses of creation, may not have their own usefulness, as destroyers of cholera germs, absorbers of harmful bacilli,—who knows what?

But there were no up-country trips for the Foochow people that year.

The tea-season had been a bad one, positively a disastrous one. Two of the biggest hongs in the settlement had failed, and that not in the most honourable fashion. For, thanks to ample settlements made on their wives, the shock fell lightly on the partners and the losses heavily on their creditors, Chinese as well as Europeans.

Mr. Cross's firm was the first to fail. And with him went, never to be seen again, Matthew Dobson's 20,000 taels, which to

an old friend of many years' standing, like Cross, he had lent without security of any kind. But in spite of the serious inconvenience the loss of such a sum meant to Matthew Dobson, Mr. Cross nevertheless left in good odour with all the Foochow community. They commiserated him and his pretty wife; some even talked of getting up a testimonial to him as Churchwarden. And the Crosses went home by the Canadian Pacific route, took a comfortable house in Kensington, and lived happily ever afterwards.

But the Chinese merchants to whom he owed several hundred thousand taels, murmured loudly. His own servants, to whom wages were overdue, murmured too. And the autumn went on, and they got no work, and the winter promised to be a hard one. Those were evil days in Foochow city.

Next, the troops stationed in the city were changed, and with them came a new Viceroy, violently anti-foreign. He arrived just at the time when the missionaries, strengthened and refreshed by their three months' holiday at the seaside, were re-opening their winter campaign against heathenism. This yearly campaign, carried on with more zeal than discretion, usually lasted from October to June. The schools were re-opened, and various exceedingly new brooms, *sc.* new arrivals burning for a martyr's crown, careered aimlessly up country, in spite of Mr. Curtis's warning that the times were unsafe. For the last spring had seen riots in the Yangtsze valley, and those who could read the signs of the times predicted trouble very shortly in Foochow itself.

Just the time when foreigners ought to have been most friendly, most united amongst themselves. Unfortunately, it was just the time when the storm that had so long been threatening among the ladies, broke out.

During the whole summer, four solid months, Mrs. Bradley had been friends with Sacha Dobson, and had not quarrelled with Mrs. Curtis. Of course such an unnatural state of affairs could not be expected to last.

Mrs. Curtis had borne with meekness the unpleasant meetings with, and forced introductions to, various members of the Outdoor Staff, only revenging herself on their unfortunate existence by gracefully ignoring, not cutting them, on the next occasion she happened to meet them. That was fair, in the eyes of Foochow society. But Mrs. Bradley was getting really unbearable, the Consul's wife felt. Mrs. Curtis never could be sure what extraordinary person she might have to meet,—*e.g.* that very evening as she prepared for a "pot-luck" dinner at the Commissioner's house.

So, like a wise woman, she took the precaution of finding out from her amah who Mrs. Bradley's guests were to be.

Not the Dobsons, at any rate. For some inexplicable reason, Mrs. Bradley had never forced their society on Mrs. Curtis. In fact, she never spoke of them, and this silence was becoming suspicious to Mrs. Curtis.

"Mamma!" It was Annie who spoke, Annie who had been allowed to come in and see the finishing touches put to her mother's beauty. "Do you know Harry was walking home with Miss Dobson last night?"

Mrs. Curtis gasped—perhaps from the tightness of her stays. "Annie, you are talking about what you don't understand. Run and see if the chairs are at the door."

But when she was gone Mrs. Curtis locked the door, and turning to the amah demanded if what Annie had said was true.

Certainly true, as every one in Foochow knew. The amah had only been waiting to be questioned for many weeks past; for naturally, she had no intention of volunteering any information. But now that Mrs. Curtis wanted to know, here was news indeed, in detail, and with circumstances that made the Consul's wife shiver with rage. Sacha's father did not know; here was the only hopeful point in the affair. But it was a bad case, a very bad case, and if all the amah said was true, very nearly hopeless.

And now she had to go and dine with, and smile upon, the woman who was the heart and soul of this villainy!

For, prejudiced as she was against her, Mrs. Curtis did not for one moment entertain the idea that Sacha had conceived and carried through this flirtation all by herself. The girl was far too sleepy, too stupid if you like, to form such a plan. It was assuredly the work of Mrs. Bradley, done to spite Mrs. Curtis, and to ruin Harry's prospects.

But Mrs. Bradley should see that Mrs. Curtis was no fool, after all. She would fight her with her own weapons, and beat her too. And the campaign should begin to-night.

Butter could scarcely have melted in Mrs. Curtis's mouth that evening at Mrs. Bradley's table. Glycerine was vinegar in comparison with her. Mr. Bradley, who had really enjoyed the meal in her company, quite sighed when the ladies, who were simply his wife and Mrs. Curtis, rose to leave them.

But the moment she got into the drawing-room, Mrs. Curtis's manner changed. To speak plainly, the two ladies had a regular fight.

As they were alone, the exact details of that fight have never been clearly established. Each lady declared, in repeating the story to her friends—of course it was all over Foochow next day—that she had carried off the victory. One point is undoubted, that Mrs. Bradley, completely losing her temper, attempted, or actually did, box Mrs. Curtis's ears. What for is doubtful. Mrs. Bradley said it was on account of the scandalous things. Mrs. Curtis had accused her of, in particular for declaring that, in former years, she had caused a divorce and a suicide in a port in which she happened to live. Mrs. Curtis declared that finding herself routed on every point in regard to the intrigue in question, Mrs. Bradley had attempted violence, and had only been restrained by Mrs. Curtis's quietly emptying a bowl of flowers over her head,—which feat, in face of the fact that Mrs. Bradley was at

least head and shoulders taller than Mrs. Curtis, must simply have bordered on the miraculous.

The noise that accompanied this scene finally penetrated to the dining-room, where the Consul and the Commissioner were smoking peacefully.

"What's the matter? Shall we go and see?" asked the Consul in alarm.

"No, no," answered Mr. Bradley quickly. "If they want us, they will send for us."

And he was right. Before long Mrs. Curtis's voice was heard calling for her chair and her husband. Nor did Mr. Bradley urge Mr. Curtis either to stay or to bid good-night to his hostess.

CHAPTER VIII.

Mrs. Curtis had made a great mistake in being the first to commence hostilities.

For Mrs. Bradley was getting tired, mortally tired, of Sacha. At first she had taken her up violently, and every day notes, written on the vilest of letter paper, even on the backs of circulars, and enclosed in the cheapest of envelopes, would arrive for "Miss Dobson." But of late these chits had decreased. Another favourite was arising, in the shape of a young and lively American, wife of a tide-surveyor, and if Mrs. Curtis had only known it, Sacha's days of preferment were over.

But of course this scene revived all Mrs. Bradley's dying affections, and she hastened to despatch a chit to Sacha next morning, inviting her to tea.

Now it happened that Sacha had a touch of fever that day, and could not keep the appointment. And so, about six o'clock, Matthew Dobson walked up to make his daughter's excuses.

Mrs. Bradley received him with joy. That day, although Wednesday, when she was "at home," she had not received a single visitor. She had not been able to recount her glorious triumph of last night to any one, except to her husband, who had received the intelligence with the quietness of despair.

"I am very sorry, very, very sorry, Harriet," he said, "that you have quarrelled with Mrs. Curtis. I did hope you would have learned at last to keep quiet, so that we might have gone out of Foochow in peace. Mrs. Curtis isn't a quarrelsome woman, and you might surely have kept on civil terms with her!"

"Indeed, I hadn't any wish to do so!" retorted Mrs. Bradley with a snort. "She is a most insufferable woman, snobbish to the last degree. Why, she absolutely insulted me, as I told you months ago, about Mr. Dobson's coming to call on me first. If you were the least manly, you would never have sat quietly by and seen your wife dragged through the mud like that. Oh, it was cruel, cruel! But only what I ought to have expected from you. Why don't you let me go away, and go back to your old bachelor life? I'm sure it would suit you much better!" And Mrs. Bradley, throwing up her arms, was about to subside on the sofa in a loud fit of hysterics when Mr. Bradley wisely gave in.

Now in an evil moment, soon after his marriage, Mr. Bradley had disclosed to his wife the secrets of his bachelor life. And, ever after, he had been her slave in consequence of this openness. Deplore his foolishness as he might, Mr. Bradley was all the same a ruined man in respect of marital authority, or even guidance. Whenever he dared even to suggest to his wife that her conduct was unwise, he was reminded of his own past, and his lips sealed by a threat to disclose his wild oats to the world. And that threat invariably brought Mr. Bradley to a better frame of mind. For he was even more afraid of what the world thought of him than of what his wife thought.

But the present crisis was a troublesome one, and after he had succeeded in pacifying Mrs. Bradley, by promising to help her through any real difficulty, Mr. Bradley felt it his duty to try and represent to her that, by throwing Harry Curtis and Sacha Dobson together, she was acting without the support of Sacha's father, which it would be wiser to get. And having started her

on this tack, and flattered her pride by telling her it would require skilful engineering, the Commissioner departed up country for a week, danger or no danger, and trusted he would find the storm blown over by the time he came back.

If Sacha had come that afternoon, Mrs. Bradley must have told her everything. What people said about herself, how her friends defended her, and how angry Mrs. Curtis was at her son being led away. As Sacha did not come, she told it all to Mr. Dobson. For as she often thanked Heaven, there was no false delicacy about Mrs. Bradley. She called things by their right names, and wouldn't have minded speaking the truth to the devil himself. Why, therefore, should she mince matters with Matthew Dobson?—a man who had so often told her racy stories, of not quite the kind retailed in general society. Why should it make any difference to him that the story was now about himself and his family? And it wasn't making any difference, either. She couldn't see his face well; the room was growing so dusk. But he was flicking away the insects with a fan just as regularly as ever. No, he scarcely stopped even when she told him how Miss Pointz had been won over, and was in daily and favoured communion with Mrs. Curtis, all without his knowledge.

Mrs. Bradley had begun to think he was not listening, and was proceeding to lay on the paint as regarded the intimacy of Harry and Sacha, when extraordinary to relate, the worm turned.

"Thank you, Mrs. Bradley. But, why didn't you tell me before?"

Whereupon he departed, leaving Mrs. Bradley somewhat surprised that this was his only good-night.

It was getting too late for him to go and walk himself calm before dinner. It was past seven, and pitch dark. Too late even to go to the Club, even if he had felt inclined to laugh, and joke, and hear the news of the day, the usual "gup," after what he had just been hearing. He must make haste home, and try and coax

Sacha to get up and come down to dinner. His poor Sacha! that they were all plotting against, and trying to ruin. Why, oh why had he ever trusted her to that woman! He might have known that she would have no scruple in trying to play on her affections, and get her entangled and made a fool of, just to amuse herself and spite Mrs. Curtis. The names that Matthew Dobson was calling Mrs. Bradley at that moment were neither Christian nor parliamentary.

As to what he was to do, Matthew Dobson had quite made up his mind. He would, of course, dismiss Miss Pointz at once, making it a point that she should return to England. That he would do to-morrow morning, just in time to send her down to the Anchorage for the Hong Kong steamer. And the very next day he would take Sacha away for a two months' trip to Japan. It would do her good, and it would break this damned intimacy.

Not that Matthew for one moment dreamt of thinking Sacha had been unwise or deceitful. Deceit!—there was not a scrap of guile in her, poor little soul. She knew no wrong, and suspected no wrong. And no wrong should come to her.

For Matthew Dobson had already composed in his mind a short and telling letter to the Inspector General of Customs in Peking. He evidently thought that no difficulty would be made about removing this luckless young Curtis during those two months in Japan. Of course, Matthew Dobson did not know that that day's steamer had already forwarded the same request to Peking from two different quarters, to one and the same person. One was a confidential communication from the Commissioner; the other a private note from Mrs. Curtis.

His mind made up, Matthew Dobson felt a strange and delightful calmness creep over him. After all, the affair was so simple, and might have been so much worse. It was all entirely in his own hands, luckily, and he could trust himself to carry through anything he had planned. Even the coming interview

with Miss Pointz was without any terrors. For he did not mean to accuse her of anything, or to give her any reason for her dismissal. He meant simply to pay her a certain number of dollars, and shew her the door. He had made a mistake in having out any companion for Sacha; an expensive mistake. But it was over and done with, and there was no use crying over spilt milk.

Sacha would not come down to dinner, and Miss Pointz sent a message to say she had a headache, and could not come. And Matthew Dobson felt glad he was free from her presence. He would have felt a Judas if he had been ordinarily civil to her; and it was of no use getting over the interview that night. She must have no time left to communicate with the enemy before leaving Foochow.

After dinner, having satisfied himself that Sacha did not intend to starve herself to death (on which point the boy who had waited on her might have amply contented him) he took an old and favourite long chair into the verandah, and began a very serious deliberation with himself.

Not about the immediate future; that was settled as irrevocably as though it had been already past. But about Sacha's distant future and prospects, when she had no longer her father to protect her.

Sacha was not a British subject of course, and he could not make her one. But he could make her an heiress, and he would do so. He ought to have done so long ago, only somehow or other he had always put off making his will. Indeed, he would not have thought of it now, but for the way in which the falseness of Sacha's position had been forced upon him that day.

Yes, he would make a will the very next morning, without even waiting to do so till he passed through Hong Kong or Shanghai. Whitaker would help him to make it legal, and Whitaker was lying on his writing-table. He would go and fetch it now.

And it might also tell him, since you can find everything in Whitaker, whether it was possible for him to take out a summons against Mrs. Curtis for tampering with his governess.

Ah, that would indeed be a glorious triumph for Matthew! Fancy the agitation of Foochow at the mere threat of an action! Fancy the consternation of the Consul, the discomfiture of his wife!

What fun there would be over the scandal! He would get a lawyer and a reporter from Hong Kong; and then, he would go off to Japan and read the accounts of the trial in the newspaper! If only, by some good chance, she had said, or written, anything that was legally actionable. But had she? Or had Mrs. Bradley put into her own words Mrs. Curtis's sentiments only? At any rate, Matthew might as well get Whitaker just now, and see if he had anything to say about wills and libels.

He rose, and walked to the verandah window to throw away his cigar. And, looking out, he saw a red glow in the sky, a reflected glow, that he had seen only too often. It was the reflection of a fire in Foochow city.

The verandah ran all round the house, and from the other side Matthew would have a good view of the conflagration. A pretty big fire it evidently was, and one which came at an unusual time of year. In winter he would not have been astonished at it, in view of the utter carelessness of natives about cheap lamps, bed-curtains, and the other trifling circumstances, which are all that is required in a Chinese city for a big fire. But Foochow was in a ticklish state just then, what with secret societies, missionaries, and soldiers. So Matthew went round to see if he could tell what part of the city was in flames.

Bang went Miss Pointz's venetians as he passed that modest spinster's apartment. Matthew smiled to himself as he thought this was the last night she would have to guard herself from his (possible) gaze. The back verandah was full of servants, all watching the fire, and chattering with perfect complacency over it.

"Wailo!" said Matthew impatiently, and they all fled. For Sacha's dressing-room looked out on this verandah, and the unmelodious voices of his household might awaken her from her sleep.

The head boy alone lingered near his master. He had served him for the last twenty-five years, and had known Sacha in her Formosa days. Yet he had invariably maintained a stolidity of manner as though she had been a perfect stranger to him, ever since her arrival in Foochow. He always listened with an immovable countenance both to oaths hurled at him and to blessings poured on him. Matthew Dobson had never tried to win this man, but had indeed always treated him more like a dog than a human being. The only tie between them was dollars, the master declared, with all the Englishman's contempt for a servile race. The boy had found this a good place for squeezing, and had stuck to it accordingly.

"What side fire, boy?"

"Jesus-man house."

Yes, it was undoubtedly the Presbyterian Mission Hospital that was in flames. And Matthew Dobson felt sure, as any other foreigner in his place would have felt sure, that this was the work of rioters. Surely he could distinguish yells and shrieks, even at this distance. It was impossible for a man of his temperament to stand by and see his fellow-countrymen done to death. Matthew Dobson was both strong and brave, and moreover flattered himself not a little on the hold he possessed over the natives. Clearly he was wanted over on the other side of the water.

But he must say good-night to Sacha first. She was evidently not in bed, by the light that streamed through her venetians. Perhaps she was frightened at the glare in the sky, too frightened to call out to him. He did not wait to knock at her door, but turned the handle quietly and went in.

Sacha was lying on a long chair, reading a book, and eating a bit of chocolate.

"What is the noise outside, father?"

"Oh, only a fire in the city," he answered carelessly. "I shall go over and see it. You had better go to bed, Sacha."

"Yes, I'm going," she answered lazily. "You'll come in quietly, won't you, and not stamp about the house, and wake us all up?"

She put a yawning, sleepy face up for him to kiss. She never kissed him; she always left him to kiss her. Had she been asked why she did not perform this ordinary act of courtesy between father and child, she would have opened her eyes at the idea of such a duty being expected of her. Clearly men, fathers included, had been simply created to wait on women.

"Good-night, Sacha. I'll be sure to come in quietly."

* * * * * *

And so he did. Nothing could have been more awful in its quietness than the entry of Matthew Dobson into his own house the next morning. He came in, carried by two coolies, and covered with a cloth, and close behind him came his boy, carried in the same way.

And yet it was in no riot that Matthew had found his death. The fire had been the work of pure accident, and the Chinese braves were in no way connected with it. Before he reached the Hospital Matthew Dobson had indeed already begun to marvel at the ease with which he was allowed to jostle his way through the streets. The sick inside its walls were being carried out when he arrived on the scene. The Chinese were standing round, their hands in their pockets, not making a single effort either to aid in the rescue, or to prevent the fire from spreading any farther. Why should they, when they themselves would not be losers thereby, only foreigners, who owned all the houses round?

But they turned to run away, to view matters from a safer distance, when, with a crash, the roof of the Hospital fell in. It buried in its smoking ruins one martyr and two sinners, all hurried from life without a moment's warning.

One was a young missionary, only lately arrived. The other two were Matthew Dobson and his Chinese boy.

CHAPTER IX.

And what was to become of Sacha?

There was no difficulty in disposing of Miss Pointz. Her contract saved her. It was of necessity cancelled, and the Consul did not hesitate at once to hand over to her her passage-money home out of the dead man's estate. Of course she found it impossible to stay in the house after that terrible night, and took up her abode the very next morning with Mrs. Curtis, who found her exceedingly useful in taking Annie's education, temporarily, off her own hands.

Mrs. Bradley had, of course, been one of the first to hear the news, and swooped down on Matthew Dobson's house with the eagerness of a bird of prey. She longed to hear all particulars, and most distinctly came with this unsatisfied yearning as a prominent design in her mind. But to her mortification she found the Consul and his Assistant already in possession, and so could only content herself with finding out Sacha.

Sacha, filled with an infinite pity for herself, was crying loudly and unmusically when Mrs. Bradley went into her room. The day was a hot one, although October was drawing to an end, and Sacha was merely wrapped in a tea-gown, her bare feet in straw slippers, and her magnificent hair in one thick plait down

her back. Matthew Dobson had never been able to rouse his daughter to an ordinary European costume in the early morning. Sacha had taken to ordinary Eastern undress quite simply and naturally, as though to be untidy and invisible before tiffin time had been part of her inheritance from her mother's side.

"Poor dear child!" cried the too sensitive Mrs. Bradley. "That I should have to mingle my tears with yours! Poor little lonely, deserted one!"

Sacha, upon being reminded of her grievous condition, grievous beyond what either she or Mrs. Bradley had a notion of, wept more copiously than ever. Mrs. Bradley, who had really come exclusively for particulars of the last night's tragedy, tried hard to stop the flood of tears. But finding that Sacha had sobbed, not only her eyes nearly out, but all her breath away, she went out of the room for the ostensible purpose of procuring cold water, but really to try and glean some intelligence from the Consul.

That worthy official was seeking strength and refreshment for mind and body at the dining-room sideboard. He shook his head with the solemn shake that only two glasses of sherry at least could produce on him, and greeted Mrs. Bradley with an amiability which was utterly oblivious of their last meeting, the memorable dinner of two nights before.

"A bad, a very serious business this is, I am afraid," he sighed. "Taken from us without any warning, any preparation!"

Mr. Curtis may have mistaken, or he may only have been confusing, Mrs. Bradley's portly form and sweeping robes with such a dignitary as the Roman Catholic Bishop, who, as a warm friend of Matthew Dobson's, had been one of the earliest visitors at his house. At any rate, he did not address the Commissioner's wife by name for several minutes, not indeed until she asked:

"What is to become of Sacha just now? Surely she ought not to stay here by herself!"

"No, Mrs. Bradley, no! no! no!" said the Consul with unnecessary reiteration. "But to tell you the truth, I don't know where to send her; I don't know in the least where to send her. My wife has taken such a—ahem, ahem,—prejudice against her, doesn't like her, you understand. And everything is in such a confusion here, I don't seem to be able to find any papers, business papers, you know. You understand there must be papers somewhere. You're a clever woman, Mrs. Bradley, and understand business, and Sacha—"

He was getting very involved, between his wine-glass and his words. Mrs. Bradley interrupted him unceremoniously enough:

"Do you want to get rid of Sacha until her father's affairs are settled up?"

"Oh, I daresay the French Sisters would take her in," Mr. Curtis said. "Of course she could pay them back afterwards. Her father must have left her a lot of money. She will be a catch for all our needy young fellows, in spite of her dark skin!"

"I will take charge of her, if you like," Mrs. Bradley said hastily. "I came down to take her away now."

"Very kind indeed of you," grinned the Consul. "Yes, she's far better out of this house."

But he did not think it necessary to tell Mrs. Bradley that, if he could not find a will, a document which, knowing Matthew Dobson's carelessness in business matters, as lately illustrated with regard to Mr. Cross, he did not expect to find, Sacha Dobson was a penniless beggar, without a name and without a cent. It was most distinctly no business of his to prevent Mrs. Bradley from doing what after all was a pure act of charity simply because she would probably get no reward thereby. But on the strength of having saddled Mrs. Bradley with a useless burden, he could afford to take another glass of sherry. His wife would forgive him all when he told her how cleverly he had managed to take in her arch-enemy. And, as the wise of this world make their subordinates

do the manual labour, while they sit and act as the brain of any undertaking, so Mr. Curtis, his sherry finished, threw himself into an arm-chair, and left his Assistant and the constable to open boxes and drawers, seal them up, and do everything that by law a Consul is bound to do.

CHAPTER X.

Mrs. Bradley's wrath against Mr. Curtis when she heard next day from her husband, hurriedly summoned from up-country, the chaotic state of Matthew Dobson's affairs, knew no bounds, and was only surpassed in intensity when it became a certain and uncontestable fact that Matthew Dobson, having died intestate, and without any legal relatives, had thereby enriched her Majesty's Supreme Court by some 80 or 90,000 taels.

"You don't actually mean it, Theodore!" she exclaimed in horror. "That, though she is his own daughter, she won't get a cent of all his money? Who'll get it then, pray?"

This was asked in a sarcastic tone calculated to make any Supreme Court wince. But luckily for itself, the Supreme Court had no nerves and no feelings, and so Mr. Bradley hastened to explain.

"And, Harriet, you ought to have considered there was just such a possibility before you took the girl in. You can't turn her out now; and what are you going to do with her, if they can't find any papers about her?"

"Oh, but they will, they are sure to!" answered Mrs. Bradley, assuming a confidence she was far from feeling. And if not, why she will have to go to her Chinese relations."

"Impossible! My dear, you can't be thinking of what you are saying!"

Mr. Bradley had not been thinking of what *he* was saying, rather. So he found to his cost a few minutes later. And, having sent her husband off to the office in a properly subdued frame of mind, Mrs. Bradley sat down to write a long and not particularly lucid account of her present dilemma to a friendly lawyer in Hong Kong, from whom she hoped to get advice without having to pay for it. For what good is it to be friends with any professional man if you cannot make use of him, in an unofficial way, when you are in need of his particular stock-in-trade?

This letter finished, Mrs. Bradley thought it would be just as well to go and give Sacha a hint, only a very gentle hint, of what her future might possibly be. So she went up to Sacha's room, and walked in without knocking at the door. The knocks Sacha would have at her door were numbered now.

Sacha, tired of pitying herself, and fatigued from trying on her new mourning, was lying with a novel on the bed. Mrs. Bradley invariably in her hourly visits found her either asleep, or reading a novel, or eating chocolate, of which last she seemed to have an exhaustless store. These employments had seemed all right in an heiress, but Mrs. Bradley felt she would not be doing her duty by her guest if she did not now seek to arouse her to those stern realities of life which were coming crowding on her.

"Sacha," she began, "your father left no will at all."

"No, I suppose he didn't," Sacha answered indifferently, at the same time turning over the leaf of her book.

Mrs. Bradley felt annoyed at this act of discourtesy. It was high time Sacha should be shaken into life.

"And so you are a beggar, without a penny!"

Here was a bombshell, indeed. Sacha absolutely laid down her book, and lifted her sleepy eyes on Mrs. Bradley's face.

"Hadn't he any money, then?"

A most natural question to ask, but one that exasperated Mrs. Bradley immensely.

"Yes, heaps of money. Only, you won't get it!"

"Why?"

If only Sacha had sat up, and taken more interest in the whole concern, and not been so utterly indifferent, so provokingly unmoved, Mrs. Bradley might have softened her intelligence. At least, that was how she excused herself to her own conscience afterwards. Just at that moment all Mrs. Bradley felt was that a girl, who had never even asked to see her dead father, never wanted to attend his funeral, never wanted to know how he had died, who had only contented herself with the fact that he was dead, and by dying had deserted her—that such a girl was one whose feelings could not be touched, whose senses could not be shocked, even by learning she was a social outcast, only tolerated, and that for a time, in the Commissioner's house from charity.

"You are no daughter of his," she began; and in a few minutes all the beliefs of Sacha's childhood were lying in ruins round her. The Oriental Princess, the mysterious distant fatherland, all those myths were stripped of their gilding. And, taking Sacha's silence for unbelief, Mrs. Bradley spared no words as she went on to impress upon the unfortunate Eurasian what every one in the place thought of her.

A knock at the door, and a card put into Mrs. Bradley's hand, interrupted her finally.

"You have only me to thank that you are not obliged to go to your mother and your Chinese relations, wherever they are!"

And Mrs. Bradley swept out of the room, wondering what had brought Miss Pointz to call, and leaving Sacha to digest what she had heard.

But the meat she had been expected to assimilate was far too strong for Sacha. Mrs. Bradley must be a little tipsy (Sacha had heard her father express his doubts on that head before) and had

been talking rubbish, absolute rubbish. If her father had died without a will, even granting that her own mother was no Princess, but one married in a Chinese fashion, still Sacha must be the heiress. Who should get the money if she didn't? This mood lasted with Sacha until she had finished up all her chocolate. Then, the book being exceedingly uninteresting, she began to think seriously and doubtfully over what she had just been told.

Thinking was always a troublesome business to lazy Sacha, who vastly preferred having her thinking done for her. Supposing after all Mrs. Bradley was right? What possible motive could she have had for speaking if she were wrong?

Sacha's cheeks began to tingle with wounded pride and self-love, and anger against that dead father who had never done anything but love her. Love her! yes, but what had his love been worth? Far better if he had loved her less, and not left her as she was now left. Left to be a laughing-stock to those stuck-up, unkind women, who were harder than door-nails, and merciless to a depth she was only just beginning to fathom.

Ridiculous it was, though, to believe what such a woman as Mrs. Bradley said! Sacha felt herself to be far too refined, far too aristocratic, to have ever had such a mother. It was worth while risking the going to her, Chinese though she was, just to prove to Mrs. Bradley what a liar she was!

But if what she had heard was true?

Then there only remained for Sacha to quit a world that was so hard on her, a world that held out to her no hope in the future, a world with no one who cared for her, no one who grieved in her griefs, nor rejoiced in her joys. In short, there only remained for her the death of her last heroine of fiction, a suicide by drowning in just such a lovely river as this near her old home.

It was nearly tea-time, but Sacha felt no inclination for tea. [Small wonder, after all the chocolate she had devoured.] She

put on a very favourite dress, a favourite of her father's, deliberately chose a becoming hat and parasol, and walked out of the house and down to the river, to drown herself.

Meanwhile Mrs. Bradley had been having an exciting interview with Miss Pointz.

That lady, as the Commissioner's wife soon managed to find out, had come not on her own account, but on an embassy from Mrs. Curtis.

Mrs. Curtis had felt many qualms in sending forth this ambassador, for her mission was a most delicate one. But it was of course absolutely impossible for Mrs. Curtis to enter Mrs. Bradley's door after their last parting. And yet the business brooked no delay.

Better, far better, would it have been to have risked anything, even personal insult, than to have sent unskilful and already half-offended Miss Pointz that day. For Mrs. Bradley could cross-examine and bully a witness without any of that false modesty or refinement which is generally supposed to keep people from prying too closely into their neighbours' concerns. And to her in a few moments Mrs. Curtis's fears, motives, and precautions were as clear as daylight.

First, Mrs. Curtis was afraid that her son Harry wanted to marry Sacha Dobson.

This marriage would utterly ruin his prospects, and drag down his family's reputation.

Secondly, Mrs. Curtis had a remedy for this threatened evil. It was, to send Sacha to England along with Miss Pointz.

To accomplish this end, Mrs. Curtis had started an amazing hypothesis, which she actually expected Mrs. Bradley to accept. It was, that very likely—possibly—perhaps—Miss Mary Dobson, Mathew's sister deceased, of whose late existence she had only heard during the last few days from Miss Pointz, might have left Sacha her own property. If so, then Sacha ought to go home and claim it.

But, when pressed as to her personal opinion of this problematic fortune, Miss Pointz was obliged to admit to Mrs. Bradley that she did not believe in its existence. She further admitted that she had never dreamed of such a possibility till Mrs. Curtis herself had suggested it.

"And how did Mrs. Curtis expect Sacha was to pay for her passage home?"

Miss Pointz said Mrs. Curtis had thought the money might possibly be saved out of personal property to be realised.

"Ah!"

Mrs. Bradley could not restrain her mirth. She laughed so long and so loudly that Miss Pointz got absolutely indignant.

"It does not seem to me an utterly impossible thing, Mrs. Bradley," she began, nervously scratching an imaginary mosquito out of her lap. "At the time Miss Mary Dobson died none of us thought anything about her property. Mr. Dobson was alive then, and he probably had it handed over to him."

"Unless she had no property to hand, and he had been supporting her for the whole of her life!"

Mrs. Bradley was guessing; but she guessed in such a confident tone that she convinced Miss Pointz at once that this had been actually the case.

"If this be so," she said, shifting uneasily, "I don't see why Sacha should go home with me."

"Nor do I, Miss Pointz," said Mrs. Bradley, bursting into what was literally a roar of laughter. "Unless, when you have got her home, you feel inclined to support Sacha Dobson yourself!"

"Oh, that would be perfectly out of the question!" stammered Miss Pointz in the greatest alarm. "I have no means; I must make my own living, I could not—"

"Miss Pointz," Mrs. Bradley put in, rising and standing over her visitor much in the way a Jinn in the Arabian Nights might have done, "Mrs. Curtis has been making a cat's-paw of

you. She wants to get Miss Dobson out of the place, and has determined, if she can't do it by fair means, to do it by foul. No, listen to me, you silly woman, I'm only speaking in your own interests. What does it matter to Mrs. Curtis if she saddles you with this girl, so long as you are in England, and she is in China? Could you turn her out into the streets? Could you induce her to move one inch to earn her own living? That's too old a trick to be played on us China hands, that sending-home pidgin! We only send home people that are inconvenient to us. It doesn't matter to us if they are inconvenient to you in England. Oh, you *have* let yourself be made a fool of!"

The feeling that the Curtis family, in the person of the Consul, had made pretty nearly as big a fool of Mrs. Bradley herself, by saddling her with Sacha, prevented the Commissioner's wife from picking her words. And Miss Pointz was too thoroughly frightened at the hideous plot that had just been laid bare before her, a plot eminently calculated to land her in the workhouse, to resent Mrs. Bradley's plain Saxon.

"I will most certainly refuse to take charge of Sacha to England," she said, rising in such a flurry that her mother-of-pearl card-case fell hopelessly on the floor in its usual two pieces [who ever saw a mother-of-pearl card-case unbroken at the hinges?], and the cards lay scattered on the ground. "And I thank you exceedingly, Mrs. Bradley, for the interest you have taken in me to-day."

"Oh, good-bye!" said Mrs. Bradley carelessly. But her visitor had not left the house long before she had indited an epistle to Harry Curtis inviting him to dinner that evening.

"For, though Sacha might be very glad if I could find a storekeeper who would marry her," thought Mrs. Bradley, "still it would be the best day's work of my life if I could get young Curtis to do so. I really believe his mother would die of it on the spot!"

Which gloomy prospect raised Mrs. Bradley's spirits to a height no thermometer has ever been known to record.

CHAPTER XI.

Sacha walked down to the river and along its banks till she came to the right place for drowning.

Just opposite to her was an island, beautifully wooded, with an old Joss-house in the midst. Right away in the distance she could see the dim outline of the arches of that wonderful bridge, the pride of Foochow, the Bridge of Ten Thousand Ages. She would be carried through those arches, down, down ; and round the corner she would drift among the sand-banks, and the cargo-boats, and the house-boats and steam-launches. They would fish for her with a boat-hook, and drag her out, with her mouth filled with water, her eyes turned up, that ugly yellow hue over her that she had so often heard of. She would lie in the cool evening air, with the breeze just making the bamboo-groves far off sound like distant peals of church-bells,—dead. And then she would be buried, and the rain would come down on her grave, so cold, so damp, so lonely. Sacha felt that she must realise all these feelings, were she dead ten times over.

And further, in the dying she would instinctively struggle not to die. And the struggle would mean pain, and Sacha shrank from pain as she did from everything horrible or terrible. She could not drown herself, in the afternoon, while so many Chinese

were on the river. Foreigners too, for there came a canoe under the old bridge. She must come and drown herself at night, when the stars would make her feel how far away heaven was from her, and the earth could only offer her damp mists and sighing trees.

To tell the truth, Sacha was far too great a coward to drown herself at any time. When small, she had often, in a fit of temper, resolved to throw herself out of an upstairs window, and bring a cruel teacher or relative to undying remorse, if not the gallows, by her body falling past the class-room or sitting-room. But she had never got even to putting one leg outside the window. It is so much easier to think an heroic death than to die one.

This afternoon Sacha made up her mind that, since she must die, she would poison herself with opium. That was a pleasant, a painless way of dying. They would come in and find her *à la* Cleopatra, but without the asp-bite. She would go home and send for the opium at once.

"Good evening! Miss Dobson. I've brought you some sweets."

Poor Harry Curtis had been turning over and over in his mind for the last three days how he could possibly convey his sympathy to Sacha in her loss. He dreaded, with all the dread of an honest and sympathetic nature, hurting her either by ignoring her trouble, or by offering her pity which she might resent. What he had heard said about her at his mother's house, and at the Junior Mess, had filled him with indignant amazement. But he was only twenty-three, a very young Englishman, with the brainless, idiotic English unreasonableness which takes up the cudgels for the weak and undefended simply because they are weak and undefended. Harry Curtis was not overburdened with brains; any one could tell that by looking at his freckled face with its insignificant, wide-nostrilled nose, and his pale grey eyes set so wide apart. He liked all women; and, as the only girl in Foochow, he had hitherto liked Sacha in that safe brotherly way which

usually ends in a life-long cordiality, but in nothing more. Mrs. Curtis had only herself and her imprudent tongue to blame for the present change in Harry's feelings, and consequently in his behaviour.

After long and serious deliberation, Harry had resolved to buy and send Sacha a packet of sweets. He knew her weakness for them of old. Who was there to give her chocolate now? She should know that there was *one* at least left who studied her tastes. But, should he let her know who that one was?

As he paddled back in his canoe after buying the sweets he deliberated over this question. Then he caught sight of Sacha sitting all alone by the river. And the question answered itself.

"No thank you! Mr. Curtis."

Sacha was beyond sweets to-day. Beyond anything but tears, tears of loneliness and misery and hopelessness, tears that only wanted this little kindness to drop quicker and quicker down on her hands, which nervously began folding up the parasol.

And those tears were the only thing wanting to make Harry Curtis lose his head entirely. His future, his present, his people, his friends, all were flung to the winds, and only Sacha and her trouble filled his horizon.

"Please don't cry," he said, awkwardly sitting down and clutching at her hand. "I do care for you so much; I can't bear to see you cry."

Where was Sacha's pride? She ought to have snatched away her hand, and turned round and stamped her foot at him, and told him that she, an outcast, spurned him and his. But Eurasians have no pride, as they have no backbone against adversity. Sacha just went on crying, and what was still more shocking, because so immodest, told him all Mrs. Bradley had said, and called on him to deny it to her. Which he of course promptly did, with many foolish additions. In short, by the time this silly young fellow had taken her home, and seen her in

Mrs. Bradley's safe keeping, he had so far committed himself that the engagement was that evening the talk of Foochow. And from that evening also dated a long and serious nervous illness on the part of Mrs. Curtis, which illness and its natural sequence of shattered health, finally ended in the Consul's resigning his commission.

* * * * * *

"Well, I hope you are satisfied with your day's work Harriet," said Mr. Bradley wearily to his wife, as the door closed on Harry Curtis. Mr. Bradley was vexed at this engagement, and at his wife's share in bringing it about. He liked young Curtis, and he did not think Sacha good enough for him.

"It will draw all Mrs. Curtis's front teeth," was Mrs. Bradley's elegant answer. "And that was what I did it for."

"But she's so selfish, so ignorant, so lazy!" objected Mr. Bradley. "She's not fit to be a poor man's wife. And a very poor man's wife she'll have to be, for Curtis will either have to break off this engagement, or leave the Customs altogether. The I.G. will never sanction it."

"That's Curtis's look-out! At any rate, Sacha is very fit to be *his* wife!" Mrs. Bradley said scornfully. "What do you think he told me she said when he asked her to marry him?—'I'd marry any one who would be kind to me!'—Fancy what an ambition! Fancy wanting nothing else in a husband! And fancy his repeating that in rapture, as though she had said something so wonderfully clever! They're just birds of a feather! Besides which, there's no fear for *their* future. Idiots of that stamp always fall on their feet and prosper!"

* * * * * *

Mr. Curtis has long since retired from China, and settled at Bath. His wife has a large circle of friends, to whom she is never tired of descanting on the glories and comforts of China coast life.

"My daughter-in-law," Annie heard her saying to an ancient

General's maiden sister the other day, "is a Princess in her own right, and my grandchildren might all call themselves Serenities, if they chose. Compare this upstart aristocracy of ours in England with the nobility of the East! *There* is birth, and blue blood, if you like!"

And as Annie held her peace, the visitor went away crushed.

No. 2.

OF THE NOBLE ARMY

A CHINA COAST TALE

BY

LISE BOEHM.

OF THE NOBLE ARMY.

Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him: but weep sore for him that goeth away: for he shall return no more, nor see his native country.

INTRODUCTORY.

THE Reverend Antony Sweetapple had always been a good boy, and he grew up to be a good young man.

Certainly, he had never been exposed to any violent temptations. His parents, excellent coffee-planters in India, had sent him home at an early age, to be brought up by his uncle, the Reverend Josiah Sweetapple, Baptist minister in a small country town. The Reverend Josiah, who was childless, and his wife, Antony's aunt, every year received a liberal sum to pay for Antony's education, as well as for his board. But his uncle, dreading nothing so much for the boy as the unholy freedom of school life, and judging that where a number of youths were congregated, there vice must necessarily flourish, kept his brother's son and his brother's money to himself. The money the Rev. Josiah considered he fully earned by the instruction he personally gave to Antony.

Antony's parents both died while he was still a child. They did not leave much behind them, but of what little there was Josiah Sweetapple took care, and re-invested it for his nephew's benefit. Josiah Sweetapple was one of that countless unnumbered multitude who believe they understand investments and stocks and shares. In all good faith he put Antony's money into various enterprises, fully expecting them to pay the 10, 12, and 15 per cent. promised him. And when the companies liquidated, and Antony's little fortune was nearly all gone, his uncle did what he thought a noble act by his ward. He sent him at his own expense to a Baptist Training College in London, and got him appointed, as soon as he was old enough, as a city missionary. And by so doing he did both his nephew and the Mission good service. For the young man was worthy of his sphere. He believed in his work, and he believed in himself. And so the first two years of his mission life were happy, even if not very successful.

Successful they somehow were not, as even the sanguine Antony was forced to admit to himself. There was an indescribable, indefinite something between him and those he was so anxious to benefit. There was no sympathy between them, nor could there ever be. The pure, spiritually-minded, ignorant-of-life young city missionary could not realise the temptations, the dangers, the difficulties, of those he worked amongst. They were very low, the dwellers in his district, and much more beasts than men. On the other hand, Antony Sweetapple was more an angel, or at any rate more a hermit, than a man. He and his slum-parishioners had not a single idea, thought or wish in common. He went in and out among them, telling them they were wrong, terribly wrong, but shewing them no definite way of getting right other than through some vague theological belief; bidding them get "the eye of faith" when they were searching in vain for daily bread, and be girt with the "sword of the Spirit" when they trembled before Jack the Ripper.

And then, when his soul was most cast down within him, Antony Sweetapple got his call to his life-work.

He took a holiday, one fine May morning, and went off to Exeter Hall to seek some refreshment for mind and body.

He arrived in the midst of a densely-packed Missionary meeting. An old American Missionary, with venerable white beard and ruddy cheeks, his legs cased in Bishop's gaiters, was winding up what had evidently been a most effective speech, judging by the vast array of pocket-handkerchiefs and salts'-bottles and vinaigrettes Antony saw around him.

"The harvest truly is plentiful," the old Bishop said, "but the labourers are few. What are we, a mere handful, in the midst of this great, this ancient empire? Day and night come up to us, from far and near, the cry of this people—'Help us! help us! we perish!' And we, what are we amongst so many? Our missionaries labour and toil, and gather in rich harvests, but they are men after all, and cannot cover one-hundredth, nay, not one-millionth, of the ground open to us. My friends, there are 350,000,000 dying, perishing Chinese at this moment, and how many missionaries of all denominations do you think we have for them? Barely 1,000!! Who is sufficient for this great work? Who is worthy for it? Is there any one here who can put his hand to this plough, turning his back on all that England can offer? Is there any who can count his life as of no value—for the Gospel? Is there any who can risk his life, his health, all that he holds near and dear, to answer this great cry? If there be, if I could stir up one to come and join that noble army who are bearing aloft the banner of this Gospel, shedding the light of salvation amongst those who walk in darkness and in the shadow of death, let him come and give himself to this glorious work. And all you who cannot give yourselves, give what you can give,—your worldly goods,—and thus lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven!"

The Bishop sat down, and mopped the perspiration from his brow, while the hymn, "There's a cry from Macedonia" was announced and sung amidst vigorous snifflings.

And Antony Sweetapple leaned against a door of the hall, and gazed before him, into the future.

What a glorious life! what a glorious privilege! To be called to serve in the front rank of the great Army of Martyrs: to go where no one before had gone: to pioneer for Truth! For the first time in his life poor Antony, weary and troubled in spirit by reason of his many failures, felt a great envy for another's fate, and a great longing to be free to join in the work of converting the heathen.

They were praying now, and Antony, as he knelt down close to the door, heard them asking for volunteers, for missionaries for China. And even as he knelt and prayed with the others, he felt an overwhelming wave of resolution sweep over him, and tear him loose from all his old moorings. Before he rose from his knees Antony Sweetapple had made up his mind that he would be one of the thousand new missionaries for whom they were praying.

Hardships, sufferings, torture, death even,—of what account could these be to him? Antony had all the spirit of an enthusiast, of an fanatic. Had he been born a Hindoo, he would certainly either have prostrated himself in front of the car of Juggernaut, or sat motionless for seven years, as Buddha did, under the Bo tree. Had he been a Roman Catholic, he would have become a Trappist, and lived "the world forgetting, by the world forgot." But as he was a Protestant, and a Dissenter, and totally ignorant of the possibility of there being two sides, much less two answers, to any question, he became a Protestant missionary.

And judging, by some extraordinary intuition, that his uncle and aunt would utterly disapprove of his new departure, which to him really meant a farewell for ever to all he had ever known, or striven after, or desired, he did not tell them he had made an

application to the Baptist Missionary Society for work in China. He did not even give his uncle's name as reference and guarantee for himself, but that of one of his fellow-workers in the City Mission. He knew very well that, down in his uncle's district, a pretty Sunday-School teacher had been selected by his friends for his life-companion. A companion suitable enough, had his lot been cast in England. But, as a warrior against the awful dragon of heathenism, he dared not entangle himself with the affairs of this life. He was vowed to the Lord, and he could never belong to another.

And so it was only after the white cliffs of England had faded for ever from Antony Sweetapple's eyes, that his uncle and aunt and the pretty Sunday-School teacher knew they would see his face no more.

CHAPTER I.

Antony Sweetapple's mind was too firmly fixed on his goal to take much interest in the places he touched at on the way. True, the Bay of Biscay gave him a few searchings of heart as to whether he had treated his uncle well in not giving him notice of his departure. The heat in the Red Sea seemed something of a judgment on him for deserting the City slums. But Ceylon and its lepers, and Singapore's coal-begrimed wharves, did not occupy his thoughts for one passing moment. He heeded not flying fish, nor the glorious thunder-storms in the Indian Ocean. He sat on the same seat, one which commanded only a view of the cooking-galley, day after day, and read all he could about China and the Chinese.

But, alas for Antony, or the Chinese he was to come in contact with! The only books, or writings, he had been furnished with were volumes upon volumes of missionary reports, missionary letters, and missionary views on heathenism in China! Very good, excellent, quite the best reading for a young recruit perhaps, but sadly insufficient, inaccurate, even misleading to one who, like Antony Sweetapple, was desirous of seeking out and finding some common ground on which to take up a position that would be intelligible to his future hearers. From these missionary reports

Antony carried away some false impressions he never was able to shake off. And even at the present time they perplexed him sorely, and opened up endless doubts and misgivings in his mind, by reason of the exceedingly disagreeable facts they forced on his notice.

First, he found out that there were Roman Catholic missionaries in China, and that they were engaged in trying to undo everything the Protestant missionaries wanted to do. But he was not told—the Baptist Mission did not consider it necessary for him to know—that they had been there for centuries, long before Protestant missionaries, treaties, and gun-boats, when Christianity meant torture and death.

Second, he found that he would have to learn the Chinese language, and that this was not easy.

And third, he found that preaching was not at all a life-and-death matter ; that it was only very occasionally listened to with any interest, and that, in short, the Chinese nation in the present day seemed simply indifferent to it.

These three convictions only came gradually to him, and only weighed on his mind when the vessel was rolling or pitching a good deal. When the weather was fine, and he was tired of reading up about China, he had many pleasant spiritual talks with a young lady, also going out as a missionary, although to a different part of China.

Had Antony Sweetapple's mind not been filled with his call to mission work, which utterly prevented his dreaming of the affairs of this world, he might easily have seen that the young lady's interest in her spiritual friend was not altogether uninfluenced by his personal attractions. But he was a modest young man, and terribly afraid of feminine blandishments, even when wrapped up in Scriptural interpretations and Bible readings. Still, association with a congenial mind for any length of time is dangerous, and Antony's life might have been changed, and this history never written, had not a most unlucky experience blasted his confidence in the discretion of the lady.

"She was such a new broom!" as the officers remarked to each other; "so devoted!" as a missionary of experience would have said—that she tried to begin operations on some of her fellow-passengers. And one of these, a fat Singapore Chinaman, travelling to Hongkong on business, gave her an attentive hearing. Nay more, he seemed quite anxious, quite thirsty for the good news. He came and sat down by her side on deck, and listened to her discourse with many an approving "All light!" Once he even tried to enter into conversation with her, and though perhaps his questions did not deal exclusively with religion, yet, as she explained to Antony Sweetapple, he was evidently inclined to be friendly, and that was all she could hope for as yet.

"I have promised him some tracts, in Chinese, which I had given to me before I came away," she added. "I must go and give them to him now."

And away she went, and Antony absolutely felt a pang of jealousy, shoot through him. Not that he was jealous of the Chinaman, oh no! but that he envied his travelling companion her easy success.

It was always so much easier for a woman to gain hearts than for a man! This Chinaman had never deigned to take the slightest notice of Antony. And yet here he was, already receiving tracts from a lady.

He was so deep in these mortifying reflections that he noted not what was passing around him. But that something was passing below-stairs was very evident to two or three stewards who had been lounging near him, for they dived down the companion and ran quickly along one of the passages. The clatter of their boots on the brass-bound stairs roused Antony, and he too listened. There was a commotion going on just below him, and a mingled sound of shrieks for help, and voices of Celestials in a terrestrial key, with an under-current of the strongest Saxon language, came up through the open ventilator.

And as he roused himself wearily to go and rebuke, as he felt he was bound to do, the profane tongues, they suddenly died away, and the voice of the captain took their place. And then followed a scuffling of feet, and a locking of doors, and the ruddy face of the peace-maker appeared close to Antony.

"Mr. Sweetapple," he said, addressing his passenger for the first time since Antony had set foot on the vessel, "I think you are responsible for the behaviour of all the lady-missionaries on board." [There was only the one, and Antony, though he felt himself blushing furiously, could not find it in his heart to disown her.] "Well, will you please see that no more preaching is done here, or take the consequences yourself?"

"I am always ready to take all the consequences of preaching," Antony answered with what he knew to be true nobility. "But I cannot promise for myself, far less for another, not to speak the Word if we have an opportunity."

The captain looked at him with undisguised contempt.

"Well, you deserve to get treated just as your friend has been used just now. I'll leave the steward to explain it to you!"

And off he walked to the second officer, with whom he had a few minutes' conversation that seemed to give both of them infinite mirth.

But the news the steward furnished Antony with afforded him anything but mirth. Nay, it gave him such a horror of female work that he never all his life was able to dwell on this aspect of missionary labour with fairness or sympathy.

The case was simply this: the Chinaman had mistaken the drift of his invitation to the lady's cabin. He had not come for tracts, and although quickly bundled to his own quarters by stewards who happened to be within hearing, the shock to the budding lady-missionary's nerves was so severe that she was only seen again by her fellow-passengers as she was assisted into a sampan on leaving the vessel at Hongkong.

CHAPTER II.

It was a beautiful October morning, one of the most beautiful of a perfect autumn. September with its dank, malarious clouds and rain was over, and the Yungkiang community had arrived at that time of year when a fire is pleasant in the evening, in spite of the half-dead mosquitoes it brings out.

The window in Mrs. Masters' dining-room was wide open, and at the table sat Mrs. Masters herself, busily engaged, together with Miss Evans, in wrapping up and directing a number of Reports on their Missionary Hospital.

The two ladies had begun their work at ten o'clock and it was now nearly half-past eleven. Certainly a very small proportion of it lay ready for the post, but the two were tired already, and so considered themselves entitled to a short rest.

"Yes, it was this arrival, of which neither of us knew anything, that brought us back a whole week too soon from the Hills," Mrs. Masters said. "Quite too bad of the Shanghai Committee, I think! Why couldn't they have kept him a week longer up there, to shew him the work? We had to wait a whole week at the beginning of summer, and didn't get up to the Hills till the 7th of July this year, because the rains had so swollen

the river that we couldn't get under the bridges. A whole week taken out of our holiday!"

Mrs. Masters was evidently feeling deeply aggrieved, and recounting a much-resented wrong. She was a pale-faced, rather delicate-looking lady, about thirty years of age, dressed in a negligent invalid's attire. For she was chronically more or less of an invalid, and had been so ever since her marriage some two years before, when she had become the sixth wife of Dr. Masters, the head of the Baptist Mission in Central China. No one had ever fathomed what was the matter with Mrs. Masters; but she herself, backed up by the authority of the missionary doctor attached to their Mission, described it as "nerves." This convenient illness served to excuse her from all duties that involved unpleasantness, and necessitated a great deal of attention on the doctor's part. According to him, Mrs. Masters' symptoms almost implied the discovery of a new disease, and were quite worthy of being made known to the homœopathic world of physicians, among whom he had assumed a degree unconferred by any known medical body.

The other lady, Miss Evans, was a somewhat vinegar-visaged spinster of uncertain age, with straight reddish locks cropped close to her head, and a figure which its owner had determined should owe nothing to art, in return for which determination nature had avenged art by making the circumference of her waist almost equal to that of her shoulders. Add to this that Miss Evans was dressed after the most approved hygienic fashion, in shades from which all dyes or bleaches had been rigorously excluded, that her hands were large and red without being shapely, and that her mouth was habitually drawn slightly crooked, and it must be agreed that Mrs. Masters, even with the circles of ill-health under her eyes, and the lines of listless self-indulgence that were forming round her mouth, would be far more agreeable as a wife than Miss Evans.

And yet the elder lady had once, not so very long ago, in fact ever since the death of the fifth Mrs. Masters, been a rival for the heart of the widower! Yes, and very nearly a successful rival too, for her knowledge of the local dialect was the envy of all zealous missionaries. But a most untimely attack of prickly heat on the face had necessitated her retirement from the contest when victory, obtained through timely help in the translation of a tract entitled *A Nut for Sceptics to Crack*, was almost within her grasp. When Miss Evans emerged from her temporary retirement the tract was finished, and Dr. Masters was engaged to his present wife.

Long and bitterly Miss Evans had resented the interloper. It was only Mrs. Masters' failing health and spirits that had, indeed, reconciled her at last. At least, that was how Mrs. Simpson, the malicious little wife of the Mission doctor, accounted for the friendship that of late months had taken the place of the old enmity. Miss Evans, so said Mrs. Simpson, was qualifying for No. 7.

"He has arrived, has he?" ejaculated Miss Evans. "Staying with you, is he? What is he like? Is he married?"

"I assure you," Mrs. Masters answered, helping herself to a sandwich from a well heaped-up plate at her elbow—for of course her nerves required constant nourishment—"that his sudden arrival gave me quite a shock. I was sitting here, quite quietly, after having given the cook his orders, which you know always tires me out. My cook, Miss Evans, will cause my death one day. He positively will. I have begged and implored the Doctor —by the Doctor Mrs. Masters meant her husband—to let me have a heathen who *does* know how to cook. These Christians never do! And Mrs. Simpson was telling me she always had a heathen, and then her husband could enter him in his Report as becoming a Christian, or an "inquirer," for she always made a point of insisting he should come in to family prayers; and just before the

time came for writing the Report, she has up her heathen cook, and gives him a talking-to."

"Mrs. Simpson has heathen cooks, has she?" asked Miss Evans in holy horror. "I shall never feel happy at her table again. He might put poison in the food!"

"Much more likely that our cooks poison *us* by their food!" retorted Mrs. Masters peevishly. "Not a scrap of mustard on this sandwich! Just look at it! But these are some of the trials of a missionary's life!"

"This Mr. Sweetapple, though, you were going to tell me about him," reminded Miss Evans, seeing Mrs. Masters was wandering from the interesting new arrival.

"Oh yes, Mr. Sweetapple! where had I got to? Well, I was lying on the sofa resting a little, when I heard a ring at the front-door bell. I don't know why, but there was something in the sound of that ring which gave me a dreadful start. My heart set off beating, the room seemed turning round—"

"Yes, yes," Miss Evans interrupted, "came at an unusual time, didn't it? But was it Mr. Sweetapple?" For Miss Evans knew it was not safe, as regarded ever getting to the end of a story, to let Mrs. Masters digress on to the subject of health.

"Well," the invalid went on, "there followed, after the door had been opened by the boy, a most deadly silence. You could have heard a pin drop anywhere all over the house. This lasted for quite half-an-hour, and then I began to get so nervous about the Doctor I couldn't keep quiet any longer. I felt I must scream if I tried to stay where I was. So I went to the Doctor's study door, and listened. Not a sound. I didn't knock then, I felt sure some one had been trying to murder my husband, and strength seemed to come to me all of a sudden. I shut my eyes tight, and opened the door."

"Well?" There was a trifle of impatience in Miss Evans's voice.

"There was no one in the room!"

"*What?*" almost shrieked Miss Evans. "But didn't you hear some one come in?"

"Yes, I did. Well, you may imagine what a fright I got into. I rang for the boy, and tried to find out who it was who had come. But you know I can't manage the dialect at all well, and so it only made me feel more ill trying to understand what he said. It's so seldom I am well enough to have my teacher now that I would give him up altogether if it were not that the Society pays for him, and they might make a fuss in England about my grant of money if they thought I was doing absolutely nothing out here. But oh! you can imagine what a state I was in when my poor dear husband came back, just before tiffin, tired, hot, and overdone. This young Mr. Sweetapple had actually taken him out—he who never stirs before evening in any weather—had made him come with him to Li Pao's—our head pastor, you know—and from there to the catechist's house, and from there to the chapel—all walking, for he wouldn't take a chair, and Dr. Masters said he felt obliged to walk to keep him company!"

"But what an extraordinary thing for a new arrival to do!" cried Miss Evans. "Didn't he come only by yesterday's steamer? Why didn't he settle down quietly?"

"Exactly, exactly," assented Mrs. Masters. "My dear Miss Evans, I've only seen this Mr. Sweetapple once, at tiffin yesterday, but I could judge pretty well by him then what kind of a man he was. And I say—" Here she tapped her forehead with her penholder, and nodded significantly at her companion.

"Cracked, my dear Miss Evans, perfectly cracked, I assure you. Not that you'd dream of it by his looks. He looks, indeed, as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, nor cheese choke him! But to hear him talk! Oh dear, oh dear, where would we missionaries be if we did as he means to do!"

"You must remember, Mrs. Masters, the proverb about new brooms!" Miss Evans put in ironically.

"The only thing I can hope is that the proverb may be true in *this* case!" sighed Mrs. Masters. "Fancy, when I asked him if he had taken a chair from the steamer. 'No,' he said, 'I cannot think it right to make a beast of burden of my fellow-man!' Then again, when I offered him my cook, at what inconvenience to myself you may judge: 'I don't mean to have a cook,' he said, 'I mean to live as the Chinese live.' I wonder how long he will keep *that* up!"

"And what did Dr. Masters say to all this?" asked Miss Evans.

"Why, the poor dear man was so tired I don't believe he even heard it! Then as for getting any news out of him, about the Shanghai people or about his voyage—not a word. 'I don't know,' 'I didn't enquire,' and then turning from me to ask Dr. Masters some question about Mission work or Chinese, or something equally uninteresting. I *do* think it is the rudest thing in the world to turn away from you as though you weren't worth talking to!"

"Then he isn't staying with you, is he?" asked Miss Evans, who was steadily storing up her fund of information.

"Oh dear no! he's far too much of a new broom to stay in a comfortably furnished house! He began last night to try to pig it out in that empty house, Mr. Lawson's old one, in true Chinese style. Wouldn't agree to having anything bought for him beyond what he had seen in Li Pao's house. My husband tried to shew him he wouldn't be out of pocket in the least if he bought a European bed—(we've got the Smiths' old furniture in the godown to sell for them)—as the Mission always makes a grant of 200 dollars for furniture. 'I shan't take the money,' said he."

"*Not take the money*!" ejaculated Miss Evans. "Why not, pray?"

"Oh, don't ask me *why* about a maniac!" answered Mrs. Masters peevishly. "He's as restless, as bent on setting the whole world to rights, as upsetting, as any—" Simile failing her, she strengthened her speech by an enormous piece of sandwich.

"At any rate," Miss Evans said thoughtfully, "he must be in earnest, and we shan't have a repetition of Mr. Lawson."

"Really, but for his ending, there was nothing objectionable about Mr. Lawson," faltered Mrs. Masters, the shadow of a pale yellow blush passing over her face.

"Ah! you think so, do you?"

Miss Evans laid down her pen, planted her elbows firmly on the table, and looked the nervous Mrs. Masters full in the face.

"You can talk of a man who has denied his Lord, turned his back on Mission work, despised his holy calling, and forsaken us, like Demas, as 'not objectionable'!"

The scorn in Miss Evans' voice was withering. Mrs. Masters shrank up at once.

"I don't mean that he didn't do wrong; though it wasn't in giving up missionary work, for any one can be a missionary in any station of life; but in giving up Christianity," apologised Mrs. Masters. "But what I meant was, he never did anything outrageous, and while he was in the Mission he was always very useful. Don't you think so?"

"Yes," Miss Evans was assenting, unwillingly, when footsteps running lightly round the corner of the house were heard, and a matronly-looking lady, smart in a pink cotton blouse and black skirt, with rosy cheeks, closely cropped hair that insisted on curling into a most worldly fringe, upturned nose, and small twinkling black eyes, dashed in through the window.

"I've seen him! I've seen him!" she cried, and subsided into an arm-chair and a fit of giggling.

"Seen whom?" Miss Evans asked sternly, frowning prodigiously on the new arrival. Mrs. Masters, in her excitement to know the meaning of this mysterious speech, quite forgot to get nervous.

"Seen whom? Mr. Sweetapple, of course!"

"Oh!"

This "oh" of disappointment came from Mrs. Masters alone.

"How did you see him, Mrs. Simpson?"

For the new arrival was none other than the missionary doctor's wife, an American whose frivolity of disposition and malicious tongue were common ground on which Mrs. Masters and Miss Evans could at the worst of times agree.

"I was just coming into your compound, and passing near his house," Mrs. Simpson said, "when I heard voices from the house. If I hadn't been in China, where I'm positive no ghost of any sense would come, I would have declared it was a spook! Well, then I remembered my husband had told me the new man had arrived. And so I crept up close to the window, and peeped in."

"Humph!" was Miss Evans' comment.

"If I hadn't looked, how could I have told you?" retorted Mrs. Simpson. "There they were, actually, going straight for . . ." Here she burst into another peal of laughter, from intervals in which came utterly unintelligible sounds.

"What? What? Who was there?"

"He had got an old Chinaman in there, and was doing his *ka*, *kah*, *ga*! as hard as he could! The very first day! Fancy that! I stood and listened there for a few minutes, and I heard those two going on: *ing*, *gong*, *ah*, *koh*! and all that fearful dialect-stuff, till I felt tears running down my cheeks with laughter. I never in all my life realised before how ridiculous these Yung-kiang sounds are!"

"You seem to forget," remarked Miss Evans sarcastically, "that you have been through exactly the same process yourself!"

"Indeed I didn't!" retorted the new comer. "I began at the beginning of Genesis in the Romanised, and read straight on through the Bible with my teacher. Your way, and Mr. Sweetapple's, would never have got me even up to Ûô-pah-lah-hen[a], or Lo-teh[b], much less to Pharaoh and Potiphar! Still, I daresay Mr. Sweetapple will soon be able—"

"Can he imitate the sounds already?" asked Miss Evans, with the anxiety of a past master in the dialect.

"Not a scrap, my dear, so you needn't be afraid he'll be up to you in the next twelvemonth!"

There was open war between these two ladies, dating from the days before Mrs. Simpson's marriage, when as a young missionary she had been placed under Miss Evans' supervision and in her house.

"From all Mrs. Masters has been telling me," went on Miss Evans, "far from laughing at Mr. Sweetapple, we ought to be thankful to have such an earnest man at last. For myself, I look upon his arrival as a direct answer to prayer."

"Prayer for what?" asked Mrs. Simpson, winking in an irresistible manner at Mrs. Masters, much to that lady's confusion. "Did you think then that the Almighty required you to pray for another missionary? Don't you think God is capable of looking after Mission affairs without *your* interference?"

Miss Evans did not deign to notice, far less to answer, Mrs. Simpson's profanity—for it was nothing less in her eyes. She revenged herself simply by setting Mrs. Masters' nerves on edge by scratching her pen viciously along her envelopes. And Mrs. Simpson, whose spitefulness was only, so to speak, skin-deep quickly changed the conversation.

a Abraham. *b* Lot.

"Do you know," she began, bending forward mysteriously in the direction of Mrs. Masters, "that Mr. Lawson is actually intimate friends now with the Commissioner?"

"No! You don't mean it!"

"Yes, I do. Isn't it disgraceful? And no one seems to think anything of the way in which the Commissioner lives! No one dreams of even remonstrating with him! You must excuse my speaking of these things before you, Miss Evans."

"Oh certainly," rejoined the spinster.

"Married people of course hear of everything," Mrs. Simpson went on. "And now that it's done and finished I don't mind telling you two, in strictest confidence, what *I* have done in this matter."

Mrs. Masters and Miss Evans stared at Mrs. Simpson.

"Yes, you may well wonder and look at me like that. I'm not afraid of any one, I can assure you! Well, last spring it was Dr. Simpson told me what sort of a household the Commissioner kept up, and he a married man, with a charming wife and grown-up family at home! It seemed to me so wicked, so provoking the judgment of heaven, that I couldn't get it out of my mind. I thought of it by day and I dreamed of it by night."

"It's a pity your husband ever told you if it haunted you like that," sneered Miss Evans.

"No, I don't think it was a pity!" retorted Mrs. Simpson. "For I've done the next best thing I could do, next to going and confronting the Commissioner, and charging him with his sinfulness. I've written home to his wife, and told her exactly how matters stood out here! I didn't need to *pray* over that step, Miss Evans, it was a duty straight in front of me, and I did it!"

Mrs. Masters gasped.

"But, but," she faltered, "if she, the Commissioner's wife, really loves her husband, you will have made endless mischief and sorrow in that family."

"The Gospel brings not peace, but a sword, often," Mrs. Simpson remarked calmly. "In this case there isn't even the sword. She isn't the women to resent, as I should do, her husband's infidelity. I dare say she even makes excuses for him in her mind, and hates me for having told her the truth."

"I admire you, Mrs. Simpson, but I could not imitate you."

And with the sigh of an inferior in intellect, Mrs. Masters finished her sandwiches.

CHAPTER III.

Antony Sweetapple sat in his verandah, looking out on the river flowing placidly below him, and frowning heavily.

Here he had been in Yungkiang a whole week, and what a week of revelation had it been! The jumble the writer of the Apocalypse saw on Patmos was as smooth as a wound ball of silk in comparison with the young missionary's mind.

And yet he did not doubt of himself, nor of his call to the "front rank in the army of Christ" for one second. Those passing qualms of conscience he had felt in the Bay of Biscay had gone for ever in the smoother waters of the Canal. Soft as the fabled "spicy breezes o'er Ceylon's isle," the literature with which the Missionary Society had supplied him in London had wafted sweet peace to his mind in the fervent heat of the Red Sea. Shanghai, that stronghold of the Evil One, had failed even to attract, far less to overawe him. And here he was, in his own house in the missionary settlement of Yungkiang literally sitting down under the walls of the great heathen city, as of old the Israelites before Jericho,—and his mind was sore vexed and disquieted within him.

Why?

No, it was not the difficulty he was so manfully facing, that of this extraordinary, un-get-at-able language, which has no alphabet, no grammar, rhyme perchance, but no reason, that was weighing him down. The language, written or spoken, Antony was convinced was simply a question of time, and time was of no importance to a man who had made up his mind to spend every remaining hour of his life in the Celestial Empire. He was making progress already with that ill-sounding colloquial, and with the impudence of profoundest ignorance was further plunging headlong into the sacred pages of the *Tzŭ Êrh Chi.* If all his life had opened out before him as simply as the Chinese language seemed to do, the soul of Antony Sweetapple could only have attuned itself to a *Te Deum.*

But is it not an oft-repeated truism that the greatest objection to Christianity lies, not in its doctrines, but in the professors of the same?

Wrong, infinitely wrong, Antony felt himself to be, as he looked from his own well-preserved, well-built, and well-painted house towards those of his fellow-workers. Were these houses—undoubtedly the best built and best kept up in the place, in the best of situations too—were these houses what he had been led to expect from those Missionary Reports? When he had heard ministers at home pleading for contributions towards heathen Missions, had those ministers, and had those congregations ever dreamed that their hard-earned money was to be spent, not in feeding the hungry, not in clothing the naked, but in shutters for a missionary's verandah, in varnished wood for a missionary's floor?

Antony's eyes fell to the ground in shame as he looked round at his own sitting-room, furnished in a style he certainly had never seen in England.

For he had taken the Mission's two hundred dollars after all, and had bought, with that sum, and certainly as a very great

bargain, the Smiths' furniture in the godown. It had cost the Rev. Ebenezer Smith ever so much more, as Dr. Masters with truth assured him. Where, except as between two missionaries, could you have got for that sum, besides the necessary cooking-utensils and dining-room furniture, a wardrobe with a magnificent full-length plate-glass panel, a marble-topped washstand, a handsomely carved and inlaid writing-table, and other refinements?

"For you can't possibly refuse the grant," Dr. Masters had told him. "You will certainly be taken for a Roman Catholic missionary if you don't make your house as all of us Protestant missionaries invariably do."

And as to the mind of Antony Sweetapple the being mistaken for a Roman Catholic was as dreadful and damning as the being taken for a Buddhist, he had given way, and accepted the furniture.

This same unanswerable objection, that it was what Roman Catholic missionaries did, stood again in his way, an angel with a drawn sword, in the matter of living on Chinese chow-chow, and dispensing with foreign-notioned boys, cooks and coolies.

"We live in a deadly, insidious climate," Dr. Masters had said to him, on the second morning after Antony's arrival, utterly oblivious of the fact that he had been sent out to die at the age of twenty-four, and that the event had not come off for fifty years, "and it is only the Roman Catholics, who think deliberate suicide makes them saints, who try to live like the natives. Putting aside the question of loss of dignity in the eyes of the natives, living a Chinese life quite cuts you off from the possibility of doing good to your fellow-countrymen. And yet what need they have of it!"

Dr. Masters turned over with a sigh the voluminous sheets of a grand paper he was preparing for the Missionary Conference in the next year. He longed to read Antony his best passages, and mark the impression they would make on him. But the neophyte's thoughts were far outside the doctor's study, to which he had come for his Mission orders on that morning.

"Dr. Masters," he said, in an earnest troubled voice, "What work is there for me to do now?"

"What work?" Dr. Masters answered, replacing his cherished manuscript, apparently so unappreciated, "Learn the dialect; isn't *that* enough? You are of no use till you can make yourself understood by the natives."

"But what can I do while I am learning the language?"

"Do? why, there's nothing to do—but enjoy yourself, see the place, call on our ladies,—or, study any subject you happen to have a hobby for. We have never had a botanist, or a geologist, in our Mission here. There are splendid fields for those subjects, if you have any taste for them."

Antony looked at Dr. Masters in utter astonishment. "But I came to be a missionary," he said at last.

"Bless me, can't you combine the two?" cried Dr. Masters impatiently. "If you're a missionary, does that mean that you cease to be a man, and become a mere machine for grinding out the old truths? Our catechists can do that part much better than we can! We are the brains, eyes, ears, of the work, and very necessary too. But that doesn't exclude, nor is it meant to exclude, an enjoyment of the good and innocent things the Almighty has put around us!"

"I think it does," Antony answered slowly.

Dr. Masters shut up his drawer with a snap, and turned to look at his companion.

The young man's eyes were fixed, in an absent, half-conscious way, on a tiny fishing-boat that was gently dropping down the stream. The weird chant of the fishermen hauling up an anchor a little farther off came drowsily in through the open window. There was perfect silence, a sleepy lotus-eating feeling within the house, for Mrs. Masters was having her morning nap (she usually took one hour's sleep in the morning, and another siesta in the afternoon).

"Mr. Sweetapple," the older man said at last, breaking the spell that had seemed to hold them both, "sit down, and I will tell you the story of a missionary who started with just your views."

Antony sat down, and turned on Dr. Masters a face in which he meant to shew respectful rebellion. The young man was feeling so perfectly sure that his conception of it was the right missionary spirit,—that of absolute and utter life-devotion to one end, the saving of souls,—that if perchance there had been another man like-minded, and he had come to grief, it must have been because he was not really like-minded, but had rather fallen among spiritual thieves. For although by nature absolutely monkish, Antony Sweetapple's lot had always been cast amongst iconoclasts, despisers of spiritual authority, discoverers of Antichrist, howlers against heresy, intolerantly bigoted Dissenters. And the result of his training had been to make him not only kick against all authority, but be absolutely sure he was right, and equally positive that any one who differed from him was wrong.

"Our last recruit," Dr. Masters said, "was a most charming, clever, intellectual young man. His name was Walter Lawson."

"Yes, I have heard of him."

Antony's voice was meant to be indifferent. But Dr. Masters was an old man, and had lost his sympathy with the young, and so rambled on regardless of whether he was interesting his hearer or not.

"Nothing but souls would satisfy him," he sighed. "I, and my then wife, now a saint in glory, tried hard to draw him out. He loved the Chinese to such an extent, had worked himself up into such fever-heat on their language and literature—he was a student by nature, and took much more to the written language than the colloquial—that I believe he almost dreamt in Chinese at last. Chinese is a very fascinating language, I must confess it. It used to tempt me too in old days. I once even planned a Dictionary!"

Dr. Masters' voice rose to a triumphant height, while at the same time he shook his head with the self-satisfied disapproval of a reformed rake alluding to his green and salad days.

"But to know Chinese well can't hurt, if one uses one's knowledge only for the glory of God!"

"My dear boy," sighed Dr. Masters, "it is impossible to combine God's glory with a knowledge of the Classics. Lawson's case will convince you. He grew to think more of the wisdom of this world than of the foolishness of preaching. He grew to long for cultured society, instead of for Galilean fishermen. He grew to long for the fruits of the Tree of Knowledge, rather than for those of the Tree of Life. He grew to become friends with the *literati*. He wished—vain delusion!—to influence the upper classes. And when the Fu-t'ai (the Governor you know), offered him the post of tutor to his own sons, he accepted it—with my approval, for it seemed to me that God was at last opening a way into the *yamêns*. And so young Lawson was temporarily detached from the Mission, and got a splendid salary, and a beautiful house, and the finest chance man has ever had to preach the everlasting Gospel."

Antony was listening now, listening intently.

"And then, and then—"

The poor old man joined his hands together, and looked piteously at Antony.

"There are some experiences in one's life that are very bitter," he said. "We had a Consul here in those days, a great sinologue, but also a great man of sin. Not of gross sin, that would never have attracted Lawson. But this man had an intellect which he received, I verily believe, straight from the Evil One. His blasphemies were something, I have been told, too awful. Into his power, for he was a great friend of the Fu-t'ai's, and a splendid Chinese scholar, young Lawson fell. And now he, who was a missionary, is an atheist, an agnostic, and in this

very city, right at our very feet, and through his knowledge of their language too, seeks to turn away the Chinese from Christianity!"

"Impossible!" Antony cried scornfully. "Only the shallow and ignorant are atheists! I've had plenty of experience of them myself in London, and they have invariably come off second best."

"What I have told you just now is, however, true," Dr. Masters said, in a slightly offended tone. "And I don't advise you to try a fall with young Lawson. He has silenced better men than you are likely ever to be."

And, settling himself into a writing attitude, Dr. Masters intimated that the interview was at an end.

Since that conversation four days had passed. Sunday was over. Not the Sunday he had expected, of feverish work, of street-preaching, of gathering of the poor together, of peace and holy joy after the labour was ended. Antony saw the peasant stolidly going forth to his usual work. The shrill-voiced women did not array their offspring in any festive attire. The servants did their ordinary amount of smearing over his floors, and their feather-brushes tapped his pictures with the same amount of zeal as usual. Dr. Masters certainly held a morning and an evening service in his chapel, but his congregation, a very small one, did not seem to be paying more attention to what he said than to what each other said. Two amahs, sitting just under his nose, never ceased whispering in an audible key the whole time. Two or three coolies absolutely drowned the preacher more than once with their laughter at a squabble between some urchins, with filthy faces, who occupied the seats of honour. Miss Evans' school-girls complacently fanned themselves, yawned, and looked about them, regardless of that lady's frowns. The singing was execrable, harsh, flat, and unmusical to the point of desperation. And all the time Dr. Masters droned on, repeating what seemed to Antony precisely the same sounds over and over again, and certainly not

exciting a gleam of interest in his hearers. Mrs. Masters was not there. She was far too nervous to endure the smell of the Chinese. Nor was Mrs. Simpson, whose maternal duties kept her at home every Sunday morning, and often on Sunday evening also.

Pictures of the impressions of the past week kept floating into Antony's mental vision on that Monday afternoon. The hot chapel, the cool study, the old man's grief over the erring, straying missionary, the strange, more-than-hinted-at idea that there was something dangerous in this world, in this great country, something capable of being more attractive than missionary life to a young missionary. Did then Satan lurk even within the pages of the *Tzŭ Êrh Chi*? All these thoughts were sorely perplexing and paining Antony's spirit. And yet there could be no danger to the soul in learning Chinese, to use in God's service. Had it not been rather the missionaries themselves that had made this Lawson despair of success in his labours? Was it not only because he did not labour with them now that they judged he was against Christ?

Or, if he was indeed against Christ, had they ever tried to bring him back to the fold?

They!—who were "they"?

Antony Sweetapple ran over his fellow-workers contemptuously in his mind's eye. Dr. Masters—a feeble, good-intentioned, incorrigibly unmethodical cumberer of the ground. Mrs. Masters—a hysterical, self-indulgent, useless appendage to her husband. Dr. Simpson—a thorough fraud, who threw dust in the eyes of his fellow-workers by a great deal of the tinkling brass of which St. Paul once wrote. Mrs. Simpson—he could scarcely judge of her as yet. Miss Evans—a soured old maid who had taken to mission work as an opiate to console her for the cursedness of a single life.

Merciless indeed was Antony's judgment of his fellow-workers, and both wrong and un-Christian was he. But his awakening had

not been a gentle one, nor had his previous experience lain amongst the best of men. He had been led to expect to find men and women living an heroic, a martyr's life. Instead of this he had found ordinary men and ordinary women leading an ordinary life. As compared with Baptist ministers at home, Dr. Masters had an exceedingly easy billet. As compared with London City medical missionaries, Dr. Euripides Simpson was a man on a perpetual holiday. Was it a hot day? He stayed away from dispensary, and let his Chinese assistants do the work for him. Was he indisposed in the least? He gave himself a lengthy leave of absence. It had not taken a week for Antony Sweetapple to find out that the care of their own bodies was more important to the missionaries than the conversion of the heathen.

And now Antony sat and crumpled up in his hand a little scented note he had received, just as he had made up his mind that his duty was to go and call on Mr. Lawson, and tell him, tell him—

What indeed? Ah, but this query was a temptation of the Evil One's. The word would come to him as he needed it. But he must first answer this note.

He opened the pretty pink scolloped sheet once more, and read:

Looking unto Jesus.

October 16th.

Dear Mr. Sweetapple,

Will you give us the pleasure of your company at *Hungry Tea* on the 23rd of this month?

Yours truly,

Fanny Simpson.

N.B.—No evening dress.

Ought Antony to have hesitated as to his answer? And nevertheless he did hesitate, and vowed to the Lord and to a lonely life as he was, he felt sad that he was obliged to write what he did.

Still, his hand was now on the plough, and he was about to draw his first furrow. And there could be no turning back, no, not even turning aside.

Dear Mrs. Simpson,

I thank you. But I think I can do the Lord's work better elsewhere.

Yours in the Gospel,

Antony Sweetapple.

But when he heard that Mr. Lawson was "out," ready though he felt himself for the fray, that part of his heart where Satan still wrestled for a foothold gave a throb of joy.

For, to tell the truth, Antony Sweetapple felt afraid of discussing subjects on which he knew himself to be profoundly ignorant.

CHAPTER IV.

The ladies of the Baptist Mission were deeply offended at Antony's refusal of Mrs. Simpson's invitation, and they daily grew more offended.

He who should have been their young squire, ready to accompany them on all up-country expeditions, carry their shawls, protect them from dogs and buffaloes, was of no earthly use whatever.

All the morning Antony spent over his books. The language, now that he was beginning to examine it a little closer, was becoming more and more puzzling every day. Radicals, Romanised, Colloquial—was there ever such a medley in any man's head? And to help him unravel, and arrange, and put in working order, for use, all this mass of material, he had an ignorant, half-educated convert, too old and incapable to manage a pack of heathen schoolboys, and who had only become an "inquirer" to obtain the cash he needed for keeping body and soul together!

Truly Antony was experiencing the force of the Apostle's words anent the Divine choice of the weak and feeble things of this world. The *personnel* of the Mission was almost enough to make a man despair of his heavenly calling!

In the secret of his own room, Antony felt sorely depressed. But then, when he went out of doors, courage came back to him.

These people, so smiling, happy-looking, and good-natured, were all immortal souls, literally galloping towards the bottomless pit. They were perfectly unaware of their spiritual danger, and perfectly unconcerned as to the awful fate awaiting them. How Antony longed to seize that jovial coolie by the shoulder, and warn him of God's wrath to come! But alas, even when he tried some of the little sentences he had with such patience repeated after his teacher day by day, he could see he was not understood. And when he said the words over again, quite right this time, he was sure, what answer was he bound to get?—"I don't understand foreign languages!"

And all this time the precious days were slipping by, and all things seemed to continue among the heathen as they had done from the golden age of Yao and Shun.

Ay, and would so continue, Walter Lawson told him. For the renegade had returned his call, and Antony had returned that call, and indeed was beginning to find acquaintanceship with such an enthusiastic student of Chinese a great help in his struggle with the elements of the language.

There was certainly no harm, he told himself, in making use of even an enemy in the cause of God. The Israelites of old had not scrupled to use for the Tabernacle the precious things of which they had robbed the Egyptians. And, who knew? might not Antony be the chosen instrument to guide young Lawson's steps back into the way of peace?

Further, with a tact Sweetapple himself was not possessed of, Walter Lawson avoided at first all subjects on which they were likely to disagree. On tones and radicals he would discourse freely, but he became silent and abstracted when the Delegates' Version appeared on the scene. Which silence Antony put down to weakness, and rashly ventured on the fight.

"Do you not consider the Delegates' Version marks a new era in Chinese literature?"

No, Walter Lawson had no opinion on the matter at all.

But when, baffled in this direction, Antony Sweetapple fell to abusing the Classics, and comparing—most threadbare of controversies—the Golden Rules of Confucius and Christ, the wiser man's patience gave way.

"The Classics immoral, Confucius inferior to Christ? Only the profoundest ignorance, could excuse such statements. Only profoundest ignorance, too, could ever excuse any man coming out to teach the Chinese.

"What could a missionary teach them? Morality? Compare the morality of the Classics with the obscenity of some of the Old Testament stories! Was the Bible a fit book to put into the hands of such a moral nation as the Chinese? Hell, and punishment after death? The Chinese had all that in their own low-class literature, and their punishments were not to be shirked by a death-bed repentance."

"But"—Antony put in feebly.

"But what?" retorted Lawson. "Do you mean that repentance at the last moment of life is creditable to a just God? Do you mean that those who repent are predestined to repent? How can you tell then that I was not predestined too to lose my faith, and that I am not now fulfilling your God's purpose by my infidelity? And if so, who is responsible for my lack of faith? Surely I am not!"

"Every man is responsible for himself," answered Antony gravely. "Predestination is only God's aspect of the world. It is because we do not know who are predestined to salvation that we deem it our duty and our privilege to evangelise the heathen."

"Whom perchance God never intended to evangelise. Or, if he did, why did he not take care that the Gospel should have

been presented to the Chinese in a form they could understand, and not in that hideous bungle, the Romanised version?"

"You cannot understand these mysteries," Antony answered, "because you are not spiritually minded. If you had been, you would never have chosen secular work, and neglected the care of souls. You allowed your mind to lie idle and empty, and lo! the seven devils of which Holy Scripture speaks entered into you. But if you had given your whole time and your whole strength and thoughts to your Mission work, Satan could never have found an entrance."

Lawson looked at him pityingly.

"I have no wish to disenchant you," he said slowly, "and besides that I doubt whether I could ever succeed in shewing you how I was led to take the final step. I don't even see why I should want to try and make you understand me, except that I think you are in earnest, which so few of our men generally are. Only, if you don't want to hear me say unpleasant things, don't speak against books you haven't yet read!"

And nodding a friendly good-bye, Walter Lawson left Antony to his own reflections.

CHAPTER V.

In the middle of January came a break.

Quite providentially, as Mrs. Simpson remarked, the Baptist Mission held a conference in Shanghai at the very time she and Mrs. Masters required sundry new garments. And so Dr. Masters and Dr. Simpson went up with their wives for three weeks, leaving the Mission in the charge of Antony Sweetapple and Miss Evans.

How the two good ladies enjoyed their stay in Shanghai! How refreshing to the two missionaries was free intercourse with their fellow-workers! How nice Shanghai food tasted! How much the stores had improved! They were all of them quite sorry to come back to Yungkiang.

But Dr. Masters soon found he had far more reason to be sorry he had ever gone.

"Here's a nice kettle of fish!" he exclaimed in a tone of the utmost distress, bursting unceremoniously into the room where Mrs. Simpson and Mrs. Masters were trying to square up their mixed accounts.

"What's the matter? Don't frighten her!" cried Mrs. Simpson, seizing a salts'-bottle in haste. For she, as well as her husband, had a holy dread of Mrs. Masters' nerves.

"Oh, it's nothing to do with you, my dear," Dr. Masters answered, patting his wife hastily on the back, as is deemed advisable to do to a child who is choking from some cause unknown, "it's to do with that dreadful, terrible, young—I can't help it, there's no other name for him—fool, Antony Sweetapple!"

Now Mrs. Simpson felt no horror at hearing this un-Scriptural name applied to Antony, whom she disliked exceedingly, and with very good cause. For, was he not a faith-healer, and would he not, as soon as he knew the dialect, interfere exceedingly with her husband in his profession? And that refusal to her first and last invitation, was that an offence to be forgotten in a hurry?

"My dear,"—Mrs. Masters expostulated mildly.

"Listen, and tell me what you think of him, then!

"I had just got into my own study after breakfast, not even unlocked my table-drawers, when in he comes. Comes to report himself, never dreaming any one *can* want a little quiet after being knocked about on a steamer. But such a report! Such mischief done! It will take me months to put it all straight! The first thing that happened was, one of the pastors asked leave for a week. My young gentleman must needs find out what for. I never ask questions; no wise man ever does. What does he find out? The leave of absence was to bury some old grandmother with heathen rites! If the pastor wouldn't do this, of course he would lose his share of the property, and he didn't care for that, you may be sure!"

"But you yourself would not have agreed to that, Tom," Mrs. Masters put in.

"Of course I wouldn't, if I had known it. But I should have taken good care not to know it! This particular man is our very best pastor; we can't afford to lose him! And Sweetapple has gone and excommunicated him!"

Mrs. Simpson gave a long whistle that would have done credit to any schoolboy.

"Then down came one of the catechists, who to spite an old enemy, had insisted on preaching in that enemy's house. The fellow wouldn't stand that, of course, and went and fetched a lot of his neighbours, who beat the catechist pretty well. He's a ruffian, that catechist, I've had my eye on him a long time, but his father is the owner of the land these houses stand on, so I can't quarrel with him. But he knows me too well to come to me in his quarrels. What does Sweetapple do? Everything but what he ought to do! Sends in a most impudent letter to the Tao-t'ai, not through the Consul, but just allows this fellow to write anything he likes, and signs his name at the end! He shewed me, just now, a copy of the letter, and my teacher was simply horrified at it!"

Dr. Masters paused for breath, and for sympathy.

"What has the Tao-t'ai done?" Mrs. Simpson asked absently. She had just discovered, quite by accident, the wrong entry that had been puzzling her and Mrs. Masters for half-an-hour.

"Nothing, and very good indeed of him."

Dr. Masters got up, and relieved his mind by piling coal on the fire in the noisiest manner possible, adding—

"Then he has, I am afraid, given young Lawson such a serious relapse that his life is despaired of."

"Mr. Lawson! I never knew he was ill at all!"

It was Mrs. Simpson who spoke, but Mrs. Masters added, "What is the matter with him?"

"He is dying now, I am afraid. They say, galloping consumption."

"Poor boy!"

The exclamation came from Mrs. Masters.

"And Sweetapple thought, hearing how ill he was, that it was his duty to go and speak to him on religion. His doctor it was who came in just now and told me what he had done.

Lawson was to be kept perfectly quiet. Sweetapple forced his way in, and the doctor found Lawson an hour afterwards in a dead faint. The excitement had been too much for him."

"The man is a maniac, and a dangerous one!" Mrs. Simpson cried. "You must indeed get rid of him, Dr. Masters. We are none of us safe!"

"Safe! no indeed we are not," Dr. Masters repeated. "Sweetapple was gone, or I should have pitched into him well, you may be sure. He's one of the 'in-season and out-of-season' men, who think it their duty to force the Gospel upon people! Young Lawson has done us harm enough, that we all know, but when a man is dying, surely he is out of our hands!"

Mrs. Masters looked admiringly from her husband to Mrs. Simpson, who nodded approval in a dubious fashion. The workings of Providence were often too slow for her, and in her opinion a little human reminder was frequently needed to arouse the Almighty to what she considered to be his duty.

"And then, he has quarrelled with Miss Evans!" Quite unconsciously, Dr. Masters had kept the tit-bit of his news to the end.

"Quarrelled with Miss Evans? Serves her right!" There was a joyful sound in Mrs. Simpson's voice, the triumph-cry of one who at last sees the day of vengeance arrive.

"Yes, quarrelled, and put me in a most awkward position."

Dr. Masters flung himself into an arm-chair, and absently took a sandwich from the plate which, as a matter of course, stood at his wife's elbow.

"He took it into his head that, as I left him in charge, he ought to visit the girls' school. He did so quite unexpectedly one morning. And there he found Miss Evans punishing her girls in a way which, I must confess, would have angered me if I had seen it."

"What way?" Mrs. Simpson asked, biting her lips and looking over at Mrs. Masters with a meaning smile.

"One little girl she was bambooing, and another poor little mite of six was standing in a corner, the tears running down her cheeks, and her little blistered hands tied behind her back, so that she could not wipe away the tears, nor keep herself from falling. My dear! my dear! don't take it so to heart! It shan't be done again, I promise you!"

For Mrs. Masters was beginning to give unmistakable signs of hysterics or of hiccough.

"I have often seen her do that," Mrs. Simpson observed calmly, "and I don't believe the children mind it in the least. The Chinese haven't got the same feelings as we have; and if they have, the mothers are too anxious to get the cash we give the children for coming to school to keep them away."

"That's precisely what Miss Evans told him, and what they had their final quarrel about. He declared it was simple bribery to pay the children for coming to school. She told him all the Missions did the same, and if they didn't the schools would be empty."

"And how did he get out of it?"

"Told me he is going to draw up and send home a Report of how *he* considers the Mission money is squandered out here!"

"Luckily they won't take any notice of his Report," laughed Mrs. Simpson. "You can write at the same time, Dr. Masters. But what a fury Miss Evans must be in! We had all made up our minds she was to marry him; she was the only lady he ever took any notice of."

"That's finished now!" sighed Dr. Masters. "I only wish we could have got him to marry. A wife might have been the saving of him, bodily and mentally. I shouldn't feel justified in leaving him in charge for three months next summer when we go to the hills, and yet I'm sure we shan't be able to persuade him to go there with us. If only he were married!"

"Can't you marry him?" Mrs. Simpson asked. "Couldn't you shew him those photographs they had in Shanghai, of eligibles in England, and persuade him to choose one? You could just get her out in time for the hills."

"I'm afraid it is of no use," Dr. Masters answered, getting up and going towards the door. "But it's a good suggestion, and as I can't think of any better way of breaking him in, I'll try it. I'll write up for the photographs at once."

CHAPTER VI.

"Yes, it is an undoubtedly established fact, that unmarried missionaries can never hope to get hold of the Chinese. The natives despise bachelors; such a thing is unknown amongst themselves. Who ever heard of a unmarried Chinaman? It's against the very religion of the people. A man who has not a son and heir of his body, buys one or adopts one. If you ever want to make a success of Mission work, Sweetapple, to gain any influence whatever, you must marry!"

Dr. Masters spoke with authority. Who could be a better judge than he was? How much of his success did he not owe to those five saints of his in glory? He had never given the natives more than a very few months to point the finger of scornful pity at his widowed household.

"The Roman Catholics are not married," Antony began slowly, but then stopped.

"The Roman Catholics! No, they are not; nor are the Buddhist priests, either. Why don't you quote them at once?"

"Is that so?" Antony asked. For although he had been nearly six months in China, he knew very very little of the people he had come to convert. What time had he to find out their

manners and customs, when the whole of his mornings went over the Romanised New Testament, and his evenings over the Radicals?

"Yes, it is," Dr. Masters answered sharply. "In the eyes of every respectable Chinaman you are a failure in life, because you have never taken the trouble to make a family for yourself. I have no doubt they laugh at you as half-witted when you try to teach them. They think they do their duty to God much better than you do!"

Antony's ears tingled. The old Adam in him cried out that he, the Westerner, was infinitely superior to the degraded Oriental. And yet the Oriental despised, criticised him. Ridiculous idea! Besides—

"If I wanted to marry, I couldn't," he said defiantly. "There is no lady here in our Mission to marry, except Miss Evans. And you wouldn't recommend her after our late experience?"

"No, no, not Miss Evans," Dr. Masters interrupted. "She is an excellent lady, but rather too old for you. How old are you, Sweetapple?"

"Twenty-four."

"And she owns up to forty. No, but I can easily get you a wife. You see, a missionary can always afford to marry, whereas many other young men cannot. It is one of our poor privileges. You have only to choose. Look here!"

Dr. Masters took a thick packet from off his writing-table.

"These are ladies in England, who are all quite willing to come and devote themselves to missionary life as wives to our workers here."

And Dr. Masters spread out, before Antony's astonished eyes, face after face, photograph after photograph. There they lay on the table: whole-length, half-length, profile, full-face, reading, looking straight before them, with hands clasped, stern, or smiling, a marvellous and motley crowd. All young too, none absolutely

ill-looking, and all well-dressed, some even with necklaces, rings, or bracelets.

And Antony, looking at them all, beheld so many Mrs. Simpsons, or Mrs. Masters, or those fashionably-dressed young ladies who adorned some of the rival Missions in the place. Pretty? yes, some of them undoubtedly were. But none half as pretty as that little Sunday-School teacher down in his uncle's congregation; and yet even the thought of her had not been able to turn back his feet from following after Christ.

But Dr. Masters, looking at the young man's troubled face, fancied he detected signs of wavering.

"You shall take the photographs home with you, and think over the matter by yourself," he said kindly. "A companion for life is not to be chosen in a minute."

"Thank you," said Antony hypocritically. For in reality he knew he had already decided against all these fair women, and that he would not even take the trouble to untie the bundle Dr. Masters was fastening together for him. "Good morning!"

He put the parcel carelessly down on his sitting-room table, and went out into the verandah to think.

To marry one of these women, what did that mean to him?

It meant—a comfortable, easy life of self-indulgence, of drawing pay and neglecting the Lord's vineyard, just as his neighbours did.

It meant—a wife who would insist on three months' holiday at the hills every summer, and a year in England whenever leave was due.

It meant—money and time and energy put into earthly things; it meant—admitting another owner into the heart he had entirely devoted to glorious Mission work.

Was not Dr. Masters playing the part of that misleading old prophet who lured the man of God to his doom? Had not Antony

received the call for himself, and how dared he now take another's message?

Was it not possible that even from Roman Catholics and Buddhists there were truths to be gleaned? Had God indeed left them altogether without witness? Might not their celibacy be the mark of the Divine in their calling?

No, Antony recognised the voice of the devil in this specious arguing. He knew and acknowledged to himself that his own human pride and his dislike to women in general were the real influences working upon him. It was not to-day the first time that he had told himself he was not succeeding in his missionary life, and that he never could succeed till he had made himself more of a Chinaman. But not in this way, oh, not in this way!

Food, clothes—all these Antony was willing to change for the Gospel's sake. Country, friends—he counted them as dross. But a wife, and a European wife!

Sounds of laughter and of weeping came floating up from the river. The Simpson children, gorgeous in their new Shanghai frocks, were going down in a sampan to visit some friends on the Settlement side. Dr. Simpson sat clutching one squalling infant. Antony beheld Mrs. Simpson in the act of administering a sound box on the ear to another. The Simpson children were universally acknowledged to be "horrid little things;" but so were indeed all the other foreign children in Yungkiang.

Still, and in spite of this family scene, Antony went back into his sitting-room, and deliberately opened the photographs.

He looked carefully and critically at four or five of them, and then leaned thoughtfully back in his chair.

Then, through the window he had left open, borne in by the biting wintry wind, came the voices of Miss Evans' school girls singing their parting hymn before breaking up school.

Oh! how flat they sang! Luckily Antony was no trained musician, and scarcely knew why those notes so jarred on him.

Jarred him back to answering this great question, to looking this great difficulty full in the face, this difficulty which that hymn was even now solving, by suggesting to him the answer he, unwilling though he was, saw to be inevitable.

* * * * * *

In another week all the missionaries of Yungkiang—Churchmen and Dissenters—were electrified by the news that spread abroad.

Antony Sweetapple had engaged himself, in strict accordance with Chinese custom, by means of a go-between, but without the nativity-papers, to a Chinese girl, one of Miss Evans' elder pupils.

He did not deem it necessary, perhaps he did not deem it advisable, to inform Dr. Masters of what he had done until he judged it too late to go back. And when he did announce it, which he took care to do before the whole Mission, assembled for their weekly prayer-meeting, it was in an aggressively self-satisfied tone, which to the ladies' minds was clearly intended to signify that remonstrance was useless.

He was, indeed, a trifle disappointed that none of them *did* remonstrate with him. It is so much more satisfactory to immolate yourself when friends are trying with all their might to hold you back from the noble deed. The absolute silence that followed Antony's announcement was distinctly chilling to his ardour. Still, in secret they would doubtless criticise him, lament over him. While he—he would hold the golden key that should unlock the native's heart, and which closed for ever all hope of connection with his far-distant country. His wife should penetrate into houses and amongst women no foreigner could ever dream of reaching. She would never want three months at the hills, nor a year in England, nor money for dress, nor European furniture. All he had now to do was to pay his teacher, for transmission to her parents, a certain sum of money. The girl herself he scarcely

knew by sight. An un-English mode of marriage was this? So much the better; he wished to be un-English.

And so, after the banns of marriage had been displayed for the appointed period at the British Consulate, Antony Sweetapple married and took home his wife, who rode in the orthodox native red chair, was arrayed in the orthodox hired wedding garments, and who could not speak one word of any other dialect or tongue but her own.

CHAPTER VII.

Antony Sweetapple's teacher, and the go-between, did very much better for the "mad foreign devil" than he deserved.

They got him a very clever wife, one who would certainly have been wasted on an ordinary coolie. True, she had no birth to speak of—they could not have secured a well-born Chinawoman—her father being simply the coolie who carried the missionaries' letters and parcels to the steamers, brought back their mails, and received in return from each separate household a small sum monthly which did not reach to a dollar. Mrs. Sweetapple herself when she married knew nothing of literature beyond the Romanised New Testament in the Yungkiang dialect. She never could or did learn how to write. But she had a soul above her Chinese home, and a will that was bound to carry through whatever her ambition planned for her.

Such a very clever woman! After various trying domestic passages, tears, salts'-bottles, and indignation, both Mrs. Masters and Mrs. Simpson had been induced to visit the bride, in the very early days of her marriage. They had found her sitting, in correct Chinese costume, her face plentifully painted and powdered, close to a small square red lacquer table covered with dishes of Chinese

fruits. They had been offered tea, had duly patronised her, and had gone away with that feeling of elation which signifies an unpleasant duty put behind one. And they had seen her no more till after their return from the hills in the following October.

But by that time, what a change had come over Mrs. Sweetapple! Instead of, as Antony had fondly hoped, adapting his household and European ways to her Chinese habits, she had only too effectually adapted herself to foreign manners!

The paint and powder had gone, with the (to her) becoming Chinese costume. Her hair was rolled up in innumerable little rolls on the top of her head, while her forehead was half concealed by a thick fringe which, steadfastly refusing to be influenced by crimping-irons, stuck out in manifold stiff prongs. Her dress was exaggeratedly European, although here the cloven foot of inherited tastes peeped out in the preponderance of bright reds and yellows. And the house, arranged as nearly as possible on the lines of Mrs. Simpson's own abode, was calculated to dispel for ever in the mind of any beholder the idea that Antony Sweetapple's wife was anything but thoroughly English!

And Antony himself had never been consulted, had never been listened to, had never been able to influence her in the least. Mrs. Sweetapple had made up her mind, from the day of that visit from Mrs. Masters and Mrs. Simpson, what she would do, and whom she would be like. She wanted to be just like Mrs. Simpson.

For a very long time she had admired from a distance the Simpson household. The doctor, with his mysterious little packets of white powder wrapped up in ancient newspaper, on which he sprinkled a few magic drops from some "snake-medicine" before he gave them to the patient, was to her an individual only to be ranked with a Taoist priest skilled in magic. She had been ill once, while at school, and he had attended her, and cured her too, she firmly believed, by making some mysterious passes over what had seemed to be a simple cup of water. A marvellous man, the

doctor, possessed of boundless power. Perfectly astonished was Mrs. Sweetapple to find her husband did not believe in him, nor indeed in any doctor at all.

More than astonished, she was scandalised with him, and rated him sharply in her native tongue for telling a young woman who had lost her eyesight through a clumsy attempt at operating for cataract, that she had only her want of faith to blame for her blindness.

"What, blind still!" she had overheard him say, and straightway her wrath blazed out. Nor would a mass of Biblical quotations appease her, and Antony only purchased a truce by faithfully promising not to work any more openly against Dr. Euripides Simpson.

But though Mrs. Sweetapple thought highly of the doctor, she did not esteem the Mission converts, nor the rest of the missionaries themselves, in the same degree. Many very unpleasant truths concerning some of those he had fondly looked upon as brands plucked from the burning did poor Antony hear; of the way in which they tried to make the best of both worlds, to get their living out of the foreigner, and at the same time to keep in with their fellow-countrymen. And if he doubted any statement he was at once silenced with chapter and verse.

Further, instead of even being what Sinologues call a "sleeping dictionary," and helping her husband on with his Chinese studies, Mrs. Sweetapple steadily refused to speak anything with him but English. It did not take her long to pick up a fair smattering of "pidgin;" that she got from her servants. These were, of course, not the same that Dr. Masters had originally provided. They had been Christians, whose monthly "squeezes" were in direct ratio to the position they had acquired in the Church. Thus, a communicant might charge say, twenty per cent. on goods purchased, while an unbaptised "inquirer" could only venture on fifteen. Mrs. Sweetapple, however, would have none

of these. She knew the market-prices, and she stuck to them. And yet she got excellent servants, trained by Europeans, from Shanghai, and her household treated her with greater respect than that accorded to any of the other missionaries' wives!

Of course she made her father retire into private life, allowing him to pay to a substitute a small fraction for doing his work, while he himself merely put in an appearance on pay-day. Antony himself had no idea his father-in-law was alive, his wife having been represented to him as an orphan living with an uncle. But had he known, it would not have turned him aside from marrying her. And it was because Mrs. Simpson knew she would be wasting her time that she never told Antony what his wife's family really was.

But when the Mission settled down for work in the October following Antony's marriage, mutiny broke out amongst the ladies.

Mrs. Sweetapple had grown quite too English. She had determined to force her way into missionary society.

Mrs. Masters and Mrs. Simpson were never safe for a single day now. Were they comfortably settled for a morning campaign, among clothes, or reports, or even merely communicating choice pieces of scandal to each other? That dreadful "Goo' mohaning!" was sure to come in through the window, to be followed by Mrs. Sweetapple herself, not through the front door, but through the self-same window. Inside the room, she was most abominably familiar. Mrs. Simpson was always in fear and trembling lest she should be kissed, and Mrs. Masters was overwhelmed with grandmotherly instruction in the arts of dress-making, housekeeping, sucking eggs, etc. Certainly Mrs. Sweetapple *did* put them up to various household economical tips, but the economy was dearly bought. It really was too annoying to have each new and secretly-devised garment imitated, and flaunted before their faces on her back the very day before they meant to astonish

the world by appearing in it themselves! There may indeed be cases, more frequent than the maker of the proverb ever dreamed of, when imitation is something in addition to flattery!

Things came to such a pass at last that the ladies met together to plan making their husbands interfere.

Mrs. Masters could only complain, and point out how her health was being seriously affected. But Mrs. Simpson suggested a remedy.

"Send them up to the Mission House in Shan-shang," she proposed. "Mr. Sweetapple will have plenty of room for evangelising there, and we shall be rid of them."

"Supposing *she* refuses to go?" asked Mrs. Masters.

"She's very likely to do so," added Miss Evans, who had been called into the council. "Her family all live there. She can scarcely be the grand lady among her aunts and cousins!"

Miss Evans' health and temper had both got much worse during the last few months, in fact ever since her quarrel with Antony. Mrs. Sweetapple had never tried to force herself upon the spinster, having indeed always retained a most cordial hatred against her old school-mistress. But even this immunity from her presence had failed to make Miss Evans more kindly disposed towards the youthful aspirant to a place in society. Mrs. Sweetapple was Antony's wife, and so she was Miss Evans' foe.

"Don't let her have the choice!" answered Mrs. Simpson. "Get Dr. Masters to appoint Mr. Sweetapple to the place, and fill up the house they are now living in. She *must* go then!"

And as Miss Evans raised no further objections, the three at once adjourned to Dr. Masters' study, and submitted their plan to him.

They came at the most opportune of moments. Antony Sweetapple had just been signallising himself by refusing, before he had been asked, to bury young Lawson, or read any service over him. Which had meant, that a letter from the Consul requesting

Dr. Masters to perform that service was at that moment lying on the good man's desk.

"And they would never have dreamt of asking me to do this if the idea had not been put into their heads!"

Yes, Dr. Masters was only too glad to get rid of Antony Sweetapple. At once, that very day, that very hour, for ever, if it had been possible. As it was, he had to hum and haw, and talk of prayer, and Divine guidance and direction, and run through all the orthodox phraseology prescribed for such contingencies. But his prayers were short and speedy, and the Divine direction was not delayed. Within a week Antony Sweetapple was called into Dr. Masters' study, and told he had been given charge, sole charge and care, of an advance-guard and outlying post in the missionary army. His present place (with his house) was to be given to two somewhat full-blown young ladies (as regarded age and looks), who being new to Mission work would not be able to stand the solitude and the self-denying life now to open before Antony.

"For you will have only natives round you. The only other foreigners belong to the large Roman Catholic Mission there."

"Thank you!"

Dr. Masters' conscience pricked him just a little. For Antony's first act on hearing of his banishment was to kneel down and thank God for this favour.

CHAPTER VIII.

But though Antony might enjoy the prospect of his new life, his wife certainly did not.

What room was there in the little poky Chinese-Anglified house for her piano, for example? For Mrs. Sweetapple had insisted on purchasing this purely white elephant,—which was of course never opened from one year's end to the other,—because it was a necessary feature in an English drawing-room. Then her various toilettes, was it not too bad to have to waste them on the desert air of Shan-shang? For the first week or so Mrs. Sweetapple was thoroughly miserable in her new home.

And then she dried her tears, and like a sensible woman made the best of circumstances.

Not by employing herself in Mission work—that she left to her husband. But she made a daily royal progress in a brand-new chair, carried by coolies in a livery designed by herself, right through her ancestral village. The natives, unaccustomed to such dazzling glory, daily ran together to admire and gape open-mouthed. And Mrs. Sweetapple, delicately gloved and toying with a cardcase, leaned back, and imagined herself a queen.

Antony, on the other hand, had thrown himself heart and

soul into his Mission-work. Morning, noon, and night he careered about, preaching, exhorting, in a sadly unknown tongue; happy when he was tired to death, more than happy when some miserable beggar, supplicating alms and displaying horrible wounds by the roadside, had actually given him a patient hearing. Nay, he even came to believe himself successful, to plan writing an account to some Missionary paper of his first promising "case"—and all this in spite of that great fortress of Satan, the Roman Catholic Cathedral, which was right over against him.

For Shan-shang was a great trading centre also, and the biggest Roman Catholic colony in all the country round. On the top of the hill stood the Cathedral, a beautiful building, and about it clustered the houses of the priests, the orphanage, the hospital, and the schools. A well-made road wound round the hill, and for a long time the Catholics had held sole possession of the place. But they had offended, some ten years past, one of the landowners, and he, to spite them, had sold a Naboth's vineyard, close to the Cathedral, to the Baptist Mission in Yungkiang. They had built a little house on their land, intending to use it as a sanatorium. But the ladies had raised so many objections to it as a summer residence that the original project had been dropped, and the house had remained unoccupied till Antony's wife had appeared on the scene.

So Antony found himself not only set to fight against Heathenism, but against the terrible Scarlet Woman who owns the Pope for her lord, and who gives to the Virgin that worship intended for Christ alone.

Antony was, so to speak, between two fires. Straight before him frowned the bulwarks of Confucius, with those other two devils more wicked than himself—Buddha and Tao. But in his rear was that far more dangerous foe, the foreigner,—who under the guise of Catholicism was lying in wait to devour souls. Antony felt that this enemy must be crushed, simultaneously with his

grand attack on native idolatry. Up here in Shan-shang there were only the two creeds to choose between. No such difficulties as distinctions between Episcopalians, First or Seventh Day Baptists, Wesleyans, or Presbyterians, were presented to an anxious "enquirer." No, Antony had only to expose one set of errors; but it was such a surpassingly great task, this work of exposure, that any man short of an enthusiast would have shrunk from it.

It would be of no use, he felt convinced, to seek to expostulate with the Fathers themselves. He must hold up their deeds to the light, that all the world might know them to be evil.

And so, with the assistance of his teacher, and a native convert (or pervert) from the Roman Catholics themselves, Antony Sweetapple drew up a most formidable indictment against Papists, in the form of a violent Chinese placard, whereof his fellow-workers gave him a fairly exact translation. Special stress was laid on the celibacy of the missionaries, and warning was given to parents to keep their children away from dangerous influences. Mysterious doings were hinted at, and miracles in connection with the bones of dead people were openly scoffed at. It was indeed a most admirably worded placard, and Antony felt quite proud of himself, and of his "zeal for the Lord," when he saw it lying, complete and ready for distribution, on his dining-room table.

Mrs. Sweetapple too, who was possessed with all a Chinese's reverence for the written word, was for the first time since she came to Shan-shang impressed with her husband's power. And she entirely agreed with him that the notices should be pasted up at once on the Cathedral walls, outside the orphanage, and elsewhere far and wide; and that it was quite unnecessary to wait for Dr. Masters' sanction.

And as she was carried through the village street that afternoon, and saw knots of natives listening to a learned scribe who was translating her husband's placard into language understanded

of the people, she felt that a reflected glory was playing round her head, which almost reconciled her to her banishment from Yungkiang.

But Dr. Masters shook his head over that same placard, and wrote a cautiously worded letter to Antony recommending him to devote himself more entirely to his native work. And it is certainly still a very moot question how far Dr. Masters was wrong in not openly disapproving of such placards, as also how much of responsibility for after-events rested on Antony's shoulders.

But, as regarded the present, what pity, what sorrow and holy anger, did not the Catholics cause him! Such devoted men and women he had never come across. And to think it was all goodness wasted, all devotedness thrown away! Hard it was even for an Antony Sweetapple to grasp, and to teach, as it was his duty to do, that the prayers of a Roman Catholic were sin, and displeasing to the Almighty.

Still, in spite of the Roman Catholics, in spite of the disappointment his wife was to him, in spite of his disenchantment respecting his fellow-workers, Antony was very happy at Shan-shang.

So happy, that on Christmas Eve, as he looked from his little study across to the brilliantly lighted-up windows of the Cathedral, he had no room in his soul for any ill-feeling against the idolaters assembled within its walls. What mattered it if the priests were darkening the counsel of the Lord, and putting the creature in the place of the Creator? Perhaps that thick darkness was part of the Divine plan for the salvation of the Chinese nation, since it was on "those who sat in darkness" that the light of the Gospel had at first shined.

A light to lighten the Gentiles! Just such a light as that one, shining, twinkling, moving about over on that hill yonder, where lay the Chinese camp. Just like those lights moving, shifting, coming ever nearer, along that road which led up from the village.

And still the sound of the organ rolling forth some wonderful midnight mass came wafted through the lighted windows, and children's voices echoed, with a sweetness he did not think possible within the boundaries of the Four Seas:

Adeste, fideles, læti triumphantes,
Venite, venite in Bethlehem:
Natum videte Regem Angelorum:
Venite, adoremus: Venite, adoremus:
Venite, adoremus Dominum!

It was such a grand hymn, and so magnificently given, that Antony, notwithstanding a slight twinge of conscience, opened his window to listen.

But as he listened, the organ seemed to give a wild shriek, and the hymn broke off into the most awful yell mortal ever heard.

In one moment, and before Antony had time to collect his senses, or had time to think what had happened, or was happening, tongues of fire seemed to surround and shoot out of all the windows of the Cathedral. Could he be dreaming? was he not asleep? Or was he only too wide awake, and were those real hot tongues of fire that were seeking to devour the silver tongues of the sweet-voiced choir? He was not long to be left in doubt.

Just below his house, right and left as far as the eye, guided by the flames, could see, suddenly came into sight a seething mass of yelling, excited Chinamen. Men, women, and children were hurrying along, some armed with bamboos, others with torches, others again, these evidently soldiers, with guns. The narrow street was swarming with them, and still on and on they came. And all the while the great Cathedral flamed, and out from its burning walls seemed to come the most fiendish cries and calls for help, and nearly overhead the bell of the convent rang a tocsin that struck fear even into an Englishman's heart.

He walked through the window, across his little verandah, and into the very midst of the crowd. There he stumbled up

against a certain beggar who was one of his special *protégés*, and who was being carried helplessly along with the stream of people.

"What is it? What is it?" he asked eagerly.

But before the beggar could answer, if he had been minded so to do, Mrs. Sweetapple had caught hold of him from behind, and was pulling him indoors.

"What thing?" she said sharply. "You no savey? I afternoon have savey; too muchey man talkee my! Belong Chinese man too muchey angry Frenchman. Frenchman to-day take away two piecey baby; wanchee take away eyes, makey medicine. Just now Chinese man makey all Frenchman die!"

There was the most perfect satisfaction in her voice. She evidently had no doubt of the truth of the statement, and considered that a just vengeance was being wreaked on the perpetrators of such a vile deed.

"Fool-pidgin!" answered Antony angrily, struggling to free himself from her grasp. "What thing you talkee? What for afternoon you no come talkee my? Can do! My wanchee go see."

But Mrs. Sweetapple had no intention of letting her husband go.

"*Man man!*" she whispered hoarsely. "Come inside, I can talkee you every thing."

And Antony unwisely obeyed her. But no sooner had she got him inside than she closed and locked the door.

"You no go outside!" she said, shaking a warning finger at him. "This soldier-man too muchey angry, every Frenchman wanchee die. You go bed, you all right. You go outside, you quick die!"

"But, you stupid woman!" cried Antony impatiently, "I can't stop here and let all these people be killed! I must go and help them!"

"What for go?" sneered his wife. "You any time talkee, this belong very bad man. All right, bad man wanchee die!"

And satisfied that she had convinced him, Mrs. Sweetapple straightway ascended the stairs.

And Antony stood irresolute, in the hall lighted up by that lurid glow, undecided as to his duty.

The spirit of his fathers in him cried out to go and risk his life for his fellow-foreigners, for those saintly mistaken women, for those hard-pressed men. And that old Adam was very strong in him to-night.

But what he believed to be the "new man" actually rose up and told him it was the Almighty whose decrees these savages were blindly obeying, that it was the gentle Redeemer who was vindicating his own honour in this destruction of idolatry.

And, was he not bound to stay at home and protect his own wife? Might the mob not turn on his house at any moment?

They were turning even now. The voices were coming nearer and nearer; they were just under the windows and outside the door. But they were not coming after him, but after some fugitives whose knocks and calls to open he could hear above all the uproar. And then came a cry he could not resist, the cry of foreign women, though in the Chinese tongue:

"Let us in! For the love of Heaven, let us in!"

There was no room for hesitation now. Antony ran to the door, and unlocked it, before his wife, rushing down the stairs, could intercept him. And the door, pushed open from the outside, admitted two breathless, bleeding Sisters. But after them, and before he had time to shut it, streamed in the mob, furious and beyond all control. With a shriek Mrs. Sweetapple gained a back entrance, and fled for her life--fled, lighted on her way by the flames of the home she had just left.

She was the only member of either Mission who escaped. Antony's body, with his head battered in, was found next morning

lying just inside his own doorway. Near him were the bodies of the two Sisters whose suspicious-looking cloaks, under which the missing children were supposed to be concealed, had caused his and their deaths.

But the Chinese Government had to pay largely, and England and France exacted several heads. The indemnity was quite large enough to build a finer Cathedral than the former one, and the Baptist Mission had more applicants for enrolment in its ranks than it had ever had before. So sure is it that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church, though perchance not of converts.

Still, although they wept for him, and discovered all the beauties of his mind, and lamented for him as for a brother, the ladies of the Mission give secret thanks to this day that as yet a second Antony Sweetapple has not arisen amongst them.

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CHINA COAST TALES

BY

LISE BOEHM.

. . . un volume que les sottises humaines m'ont aisément fourni.

LE DIABLE BOITEUX.

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No. 3.

IN THE SIXTIES

A CHINA COAST TALE

BY

LISE BOEHM.

Had we never loved so kindly,
Had we never loved so blindly,
Never met, or never parted,
We had ne'er been broken-hearted!

IN THE SIXTIES.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

LONG, long ago, in the good old days, before France began to think of Tongking, before Germany began to think of ousting England in the Far East, before Russia dreamt of a Pacific ice-free port; half-way and more through the Sixties, when dollars were worth the getting and bimetallism a fancy topic of conversation; when fortunes could be made in a decade, if at the peril of one's life,—some thirty years ago, in short, a grand cleaning, scrubbing and dusting had been going on for a fortnight in the house of the Commissioner of Imperial Maritime Customs, Amoy, South China.

Now the Commissioner was a man who usually left his servants to do just as much, or as little, as they chose to do. His was precisely the establishment a Chinaman delights in, where there is no troublesome "missisy" to demand monthly, weekly, or even daily accounts, to compare expenses with some experienced friend, and to generally make herself obnoxious. Provided his meals were served punctually, Mr. Watkins was fairly indifferent as to what he was made to swallow. Provided his own particular armchair held together, he did not care if the rest of his furniture was allowed to crumble away through neglect or white ants. Such was the normal state of Mr. Watkins and of Mr. Watkins' household for eleven months in every year.

But when the twelfth month, marked in the calendar as May, came round, the aspect of the great dreary house on the top of the hill changed. Every available coolie, both in Mr. Watkins' house and in his office, every Customs boatman, every watchman, every odd man, was pressed into the work of cleaning. The odour of carbolic fluids, of patent soaps and insect-destroying powders pervaded the whole compound, and made the house smell like the disinfecting ward of a hospital. Scrubbing cloths and dusting brushes, sufficient to last an ordinary Chinese household for a generation, were recklessly given out. Mosquito-nets were repaired, centipedes and lizards were terrified from their resting-places, boxes of stores arrived from Hongkong, the official servants received fresh uniforms, and Mr. Watkins himself spent a whole day picking out white trousers, and coats which were neither frayed at the cuffs, nor shaky about the buttonholes, nor badly ironmoulded. For Mrs. Ratcliff was expected for her yearly visit.

Everybody in China knew Mrs. Ratcliff, or at any rate knew all about her. Her husband, Mr. Ratcliff, was head of one of the largest *hongs* in Shanghai, a good solid fellow, not brilliant in a drawing-room, but excellent in his own place—the office. Mrs. Ratcliff, who had made her first appearance in the East as something between a nursery-governess and a lady's maid, had married him solely on account of his money and position. There was indeed nothing attractive about Mr. Ratcliff besides these. Had his wife followed her own inclinations she would undoubtedly have married her first love, David Watkins, who was then a young fellow with plenty of brains and plenty of looks, but with nothing standing to his account at the Bank. There had been no hesitation possible in Mrs. Ratcliff's case. She married the rich man, of course, but, amazing to say, the poor man did not object. On the contrary, the Ratcliff marriage seemed to bring them closer together,—perhaps because the lady now occupied an exalted position—which is usually

found to attract all eyes and all criticism,—and from that date onwards their names were always coupled together; in early days, as lovers and as the subjects of ill-natured gossip and scandal; in later years, when Mr. Watkins had become a Commissioner of Customs with a solid income, as types of China Coast "friends." More than this, they actually became models on which later arrivals were wont to form themselves. Other wives' husbands had no business to object to *tertium quids*—Mr. Ratcliff didn't object. A man and a woman could be friends, Platonically, for ever and a day, and no whisper go forth of the Divorce Court—witness Mrs. Ratcliff and Mr. Watkins. And no sensible husband could possibly object to his wife's paying long visits to her particular "friend"—because Mr. Ratcliff made no objection to Mrs. Ratcliff's yearly visit to Mr. Watkins.

How many households along the China coast came nigh or altogether to shipwreck by striving to imitate the Ratcliff-Watkins friendship, it is not here the place to record. Perhaps the shipwrecks would have come anyhow, even if Mrs. Ratcliff had been married to a different husband.

But however much opinion might be divided as regarded the propriety of Mrs. Ratcliff's conduct from the *wife's* point of view, there were no two minds as to its inexpediency, not to say wrongfulness, from the *mother's* standpoint, now that her only daughter, Violet, had come out to China from school.

For Mrs. Ratcliff had a daughter, and a very pretty daughter too. Pretty with the prettiness of youth, and rosy cheeks, and laughing eyes; with the prettiness alas! which belongs to youth alone, and which freckles, or turns yellow and leathery, or red and coarse, even before the fatal age of thirty. Not a beauty such as her mother had been, and still was,—with regular features, a tall and graceful figure, a skin that refused to wrinkle, and a face that looked only more youthful when

crowned with matronly bonnets. Mrs. Ratcliff had no need of hair-dyes or cosmetics; she possessed the secret of eternal youth. But she also possessed its disadvantages—its giddinesses, its want of mental and moral equilibrium, its hardness, and the like. Violet's mother was certainly not a safe guide; rather, she was decidedly a bad example for a girl of eighteen just out of the schoolroom.

Witness what she did on the present occasion. Only one month after Violet's arrival in Shanghai, she took her daughter with her down to Amoy to stay with Mr. Watkins.

Mrs. Ratcliff's female acquaintances in Shanghai (she had no friends but men) were aghast at this proceeding. Had Violet been left behind with her father, they would probably have been equally aghast. But as remonstrances would have been wasted on the erring Mrs. Ratcliff, they reserved their opinions for select tea-parties, and confined themselves in general society to hoping "dear Violet" would be none the worse (morally) for the trip.

But the two went down to Amoy, and were received with open arms and a great flourish of entertainments by the Amoy people. Not that they (at least, the ladies) approved of Mrs. Ratcliff a whit more than did their Shanghai sisters, but she was the Commissioner's guest, and brought with her the latest fashions, and was quite willing that her dresses should be copied, and was so generally amiable that it was impossible not to shew her the best China coast hospitality. So, just as in former years, Mrs. Ratcliff and Mr. Watkins went out for walks, and rides, and sails by themselves, giving the scandal-mongers round the Club-bar food for tongue-wagging during the next half-year. As for Violet, Mrs. Ratcliff gave her full liberty to amuse herself just as she chose. For this was holiday-time, and even mothers are not expected to look after their daughters on such occasions.

Now in those days the Amoy community consisted of but few ladies, all, with one exception, missionaries, and of a good many bachelors. These last, mostly clerks in tea houses, were accustomed to spend their lives mainly in pyjamas, and were warranted to consume unknown quantities of whisky and soda without any visible detriment to their health. The Consulate staff were bachelors; so were nearly all the Customs officials. The only lady "in the swing" was the Deputy-Commissioner's wife, abhorred by Mr. Watkins as a "giggling goose," and not to be trusted to take charge of any girl. It was very awkward indeed that Mrs. Ratcliff had brought down Violet! For the Commissioner realised, what Mrs. Ratcliff certainly had not, that Violet ought to be provided with an escort. So, the day after his guests had arrived, Mr. Watkins summoned his most trustworthy Assistant into his private office, and solemnly made Violet over to him.

"I know I can trust you, Kennedy," he said anxiously. "Nominally Miss Ratcliff will be under Mrs. Denman's charge,—that is, if Mrs. Ratcliff herself is not able to go everywhere with her daughter. But a lady isn't always quite enough, and—in short, Kennedy, I have the greatest confidence in you!"

"Certainly, sir," Wilfrid Kennedy had answered. And Mr. Watkins had gone across to his own house, and had told Mrs. Ratcliff she need not trouble about Violet. For he had given her as special charge to the only dangerous young man in Amoy, and had thus made it impossible for him to fall in love with her.

Mr. Watkins had a fine contempt for women, Mrs. Ratcliff of course excepted. He did not consider them capable of genuinely falling in love, and explained away their desire to get married as simply arising from the feminine notion that being married advanced women in the social scale. Love and marriage had nothing to do with each other, he said; and all his personal

experience had but tended to confirm Mr. Watkins in his theories. Further, to the Commissioner "girls" were uninteresting, and Violet was a girl. He certainly never for one moment dreamt that she could fall in love with Kennedy of her own initiative.

Moreover, Wilfrid Kennedy was scarcely, in the Commissioner's opinion, a marrying man. He was about twenty-six, fair, and distinctly youthful in appearance. His companions reckoned him a good-hearted fellow, and he was a decided favourite with the older men and the ladies. I do not fancy he was overburdened with brains; but he was a thorough gentleman, in his instincts as well as in his behaviour. Wilfrid was, indeed, the "useful man" of the community. As regarded his personal history, he had come out to China on a nomination in the Customs service at the age of nineteen, and had just now completed his first seven years of service.

As everyone in China knows, at the end of his first seven years of service a Customs Assistant may apply for two years' leave on half-pay, which period he may spend anywhere—usually "at home," *viz.* Europe—his return passage to China being paid for him. But of those Assistants who may take their leave, under such favourable conditions, there are a great many who do not find themselves in a position to do so, and this in spite of having received regular and excellent pay during their period of service. At the end of his first seven years in China a man has often saved nothing, his brain having been turned by the mere possession of money, seemingly inexhaustible to one who has perhaps been brought up in narrow circumstances. Or, he has been bitten rabidly by what is known as "Sinology," and lives, speaks, thinks, and dreams of nothing but the Chinese language and literature. Or, he has been drawn into the ring of speculators, and has risked, even if he has not lost, all his savings in strange and wonderful mines and companies. Or, he is drinking himself into an untimely grave. And as it is

far easier to live on nothing at all, and to die leaving your family to your friends, or to be a Chinese student, or to be a speculator, or to be a hard drinker, in the East than in the West, the man of seven years generally stays out fourteen.

And this was just what Wilfrid Kennedy, though he belonged to none of the last three classes, would have done, had he been able.

Life in the Far East had set its mark on him, a mark which even he himself could perceive. When he first came out to China he was, as behoved the son of a country parson, a good, religious young man,—good, perhaps, because he had never been tested. He had boldly, not to say aggressively, produced his Bible at night amongst his cabin-mates, and had steadily read the portion appointed by the Union to which he belonged—till he dropped out of the way of doing so, when his books of devotion were left behind in the transfer at Galle. As for Church attendance,—there had been no Church in the first port to which he had been sent, and by the time he was transferred to a more privileged place he had adopted the fashionable attitude of contempt towards the missionary body. His total abstinence pledge was of course foredoomed ; six days in an ordinary Junior Assistants' mess had finished that matter. And yet no one called Wilfrid Kennedy a fast young man, nor a regular "soaker" ; though it must be admitted that, in common with those around him, he often, still oftener as the years went by, took rather more to drink than was good for him. All that really happened to him was that, being a weak young fellow, and infinitely afraid of being laughed at, he accommodated himself to his surroundings, which surroundings were altogether different from those of a country parsonage in England.

But now, when he was obliged to go home, for reasons shortly to be stated, Wilfrid Kennedy had been—well, not appalled, because he had had every reason to suspect such would

be the case, but—very disagreeably disgusted to find that his balance at his banker's was simply *nil*. Not a red cent had he saved; and yet there was absolutely nothing to show for all the salary he had so regularly received and spent. It was astonishing how ten dollars here, five dollars there, a few boxes of curios sent home from time to time, often by request for those gigantic swindles, bazaars for charitable objects,—how all such trifling sums had mounted up. Could it be that ten dollars a month, a very moderate sum, spent on that legalised gamble, the Manila Lottery, had cost him over £160 in these seven years? Ten dollars, with the dollar at four and twopence, the very smallest amount he could have set aside! The more Wilfrid Kennedy looked at his bank book, the more he plunged into the hopeless chaos of his unpaid bills, with their inscrutable and not-to-be checked headings of "to account rendered," the more had he realised that, if money was to be made in the Far East, he at any rate was not the man to make it.

And so, just before the Ratcliffs appeared in Amoy, Wilfrid Kennedy had determined to turn over a new leaf, and to save hard for the last three months of his period of service. Accordingly, he had stormed at his astonished "boy" when that individual produced an account for a fresh stock of whisky for the benefit of Wilfrid's visitors. The whisky was kept in case of sudden illness, but the boy was ordered to say "no got" should any passer-by call in for a long drink. And, in case he should fall into his old easy-going ways through idleness, Kennedy commanded his teacher to be in readiness for four hours' study of Chinese every day, Sundays included. And when the Hongkong tailor came round, Wilfrid Kennedy actually refused to buy an absolutely necessary afternoon coat, announcing his intention of appearing in London "just as he was," to the unutterable disgust of the "Poole" of the coast. He even, for the space of one whole half-hour, seriously contemplated taking his name off the Club books. But alas for

good intentions! The Ratcliffs came; Mr. Watkins interviewed him; and away went economy with the Chinese dictionary and the teacher, until a more convenient season should arrive. The Commissioner made no mistake when he put Violet Ratcliff into Wilfrid Kennedy's hands. Wilfrid did not, to his own knowledge at least, fall in love with Miss Ratcliff. But Miss Ratcliff fell in love with him. Which, had it been known abroad, would undoubtedly have been characterised as shocking, most unmaidenly, though only to be expected from the daughter of such a mother. But then it wasn't known, at least officially known, though of course all Amoy had declared it must be a match, and a devilish good one for Kennedy. What else could be expected, when the two were together, morning, noon, and night? True, there was the worldly mother to reckon with; but at any rate nobody else in Amoy had a chance. In vain the German Baron, with no estates but infinite pretensions, had twirled his long moustache, and murmured compliments in unintelligible English. In vain the poet of the community had composed a masterpiece in her honour, wherein "Violet" rhymed to "my pilot," and had recited the same with great effect to a chosen few. In vain the *taipan* of the largest hong, a stoutish man of means, with a well filled stable and excellent table, had brought forth after dinner his album, crammed with photographs of adoring fair ones, and had besought Violet to place her portrait as frontispiece to the volume. Violet had just given away her only remaining photograph, and that without consulting even Mrs. Denman, to fill a certain frame on Wilfrid Kennedy's mantelpiece.

Surely he would have been superhuman had he been able to resist at least flirting with a girl who so openly showed her liking for him, and who was, moreover, the only girl he had seen for months! At any rate, the Amoy community never doubted but that Wilfrid made the most of his opportunities. At picnics

Violet and he paired off quite naturally, just after the fashion of their elders and guardians, and a third quickly found himself *de trop*; for the two seemed to have an immense deal to say to each other. Now what can young men and maidens talk about, but the Soul, and Life (with capitals be it noted), or Heart-union and Affinities, which talk the common herd calls love-making? So, at any rate, Mrs. Denman thought, and so she told the horrified Commissioner at the crowning dinner-party of the season. And in this she was only the mouthpiece of the Community, which knew nothing about the photograph.

Still, they were all wrong, and Mr. Watkins alone was right.

For, after the two had broken the ice, and through some little trivial, to-other-eyes-unnoticed accident had become friends rather than acquaintances, Violet Ratcliff suddenly found that she had been put in a sacred place in Kennedy's imagination, and that he was regarding her in a light that was certainly false, but which could not fail to be enormously flattering to her personal vanity. So flattering indeed, that she could not help doing her share in keeping up the delusion. This pleasant, amiable, but decidedly commonplace schoolgirl discovered, on the last evening of her stay in Amoy, that to Wilfrid Kennedy she was no ordinary girl of flesh and blood, but an abstraction, a saint, a wonderful phœnix, an ideal woman. A woman he imagined her without any of the faults, or selfish feelings, or jealous sensibilities of her sex, and yet at the same time a woman in whom to confide, a woman to sympathise, to soothe, and to advise; and all this unflecked by any intrusion of self! In brief, Wilfrid Kennedy set up Violet Ratcliff on a pedestal, and then fell down before her and worshipped her; utterly oblivious of the fact that she was a creature of like passions with himself.

And so he told her, to Violet who knew nothing of this evil world, all the story of how he had wasted his life. He

confessed to her how he had slipped away from what she (his ideal Violet) must approve of; and he asked her advice as to the best manner of pulling himself together again. All this he told her on a bright moonlight night, at a picnic on a little island in the outer harbour of Amoy, when plenty of champagne had oiled the rusty key of his conscience, and the unusual sensation of having a sympathetic listener had turned his head, as he was to realise all too painfully by and by.

And Violet gave her crude advice, and felt flattered at being consulted, and for the time actually imagined herself the ideal woman Wilfrid thought she was, and therefore forgot to play with her eyes, or to shrug her shoulders, or to make smart repartees, or to invite compliments by turning the conversation back to herself. No one had ever known, no one was ever to know, or to dream of, the Violet Ratcliff with whom Wilfrid Kennedy talked that evening. Some skilled in palmistry tell us there are certain lines on the hand which shew what a person was meant to be, by Nature. Alas! what Nature meant is often only too clearly recognisable, by the difference between these "birth" lines on the one hand and those corresponding on the other hand, marking how a disposition, or a destiny, has been warped, or forced aside by circumstances! But Wilfrid Kennedy saw only, so to speak, Violet's "birth" lines that evening—knew her only as she might have been.

And yet he had told her a hard thing, what he had never confided even to his dearest China friend, not even to that poor young fellow who had gone out of his mind and shot himself, for love of the cruel stony blue eyes of the only lady in an out-of-the-way port. Wilfrid had told Violet why he must go home, and for whom; he had told her all his love-story; how it had gradually grown into his life, and how he now feared, with a dread born even with his speaking, that he himself had grown out of fitness for and harmony with it.

"We have always known her," he said. "She was at school with my elder sisters, and in the holidays she often came to stay with us. She was awfully good to me when I was quite a little chap, far kinder than my own sisters. I used to tell her everything, and she would give me advice, and she used to make me promise to go to Church, and the like. She used to give me religious books too, such books as nice-minded girls in England keep on their shelves—little books bound in leather, with red edges and ribbon markers. That went on for years and years, right up to the time when I came out to China. How good she was to me! Even *you* couldn't have been kinder!"

Wilfrid Kennedy was pulling himself up instinctively, giving Violet the chance of changing the subject. But Violet didn't take it. She was leaning back in a cane chair Wilfrid had brought her, looking over her fan at the far away lights of the foreign settlement on the island of Kulangsu. The moonlight just touched with its weird chillness the tips of her fingers and the edge of the skirt of her dress. Near by, the German Baron was leading a stirring chorus in a drinking-song. And just below, close to the water's edge, Mr. Watkins and Mrs. Ratcliff were pacing up and down, living over again old days, and speaking those last words for which there would be no time on the morrow.

"And when I was to come out to China," Wilfrid went on, unconsciously lowering his voice, "though she was far too good for me, though she was rich and I was poor, she allowed me to become engaged to her. Even now, though I am so much older, and have seen so much of the world, I cannot understand how she ever came to care for me, in the marrying way, I mean. Why, she was almost grown up when I remember her first, and I was scarcely out of the nursery! But she has told me since, and indeed I believe it, that she liked me from the very beginning in quite a peculiar way, and that she has never cared for any

other man. And she has never missed a single mail in writing to me. I wish I could say as much! All her people were terribly against our engagement at first—of course they thought me too young—but she writes me that they are quite willing now. But, she was always far too good for me!"

There was a tone of veritable contrition and self-abasement in Wilfrid Kennedy's voice that gave Violet a sudden uneasy sensation. Some difficult point was going to be raised soon; some question she would not be able to answer; something was going to be submitted to her judgment concerning which she would not be able to answer impersonally. But she had neither the courage nor the wit to keep off the impending danger. She simply kept silence.

"I'm not tiring you, am I, Miss Ratcliff?" Wilfrid asked suddenly. "These things can't really have any interest for you. I'm very sorry I have troubled you, I really am!"

"Go on, please," Violet answered. "Don't you know I *must* take an interest in anything that concerns you, and especially—"

Was this indeed the worldly Mrs. Ratcliff's daughter that was speaking? Surely some of her mother's old charm must have descended to her; that charm which had held clear-headed unsentimental Mr. Watkins a captive slave these twenty years. Wilfrid Kennedy did go on.

"I would awfully like you to give me your opinion on one point, on a point that shall decide all my life for me," he said, turning away his head so completely that Violet had to strain her ears to catch his words. "Knowing what you do know, what I have told you of my life, what an utter and arrant humbug I shall have to be if I go home now and join in *her* life, and marry her—for she is thoroughly and deeply religious, and lives in a religious set,—now, do you think I ought to go? Wouldn't it be the right and straightforward thing for me to write to her, and tell her

plainly exactly where I am, and where I intend to stay, as regards religion, and so give her the chance of breaking off her engagement, and of giving me up altogether?"

"And what would you do when you got home then?" asked Violet. "How would you meet her?"

"I shouldn't go home. I should have nothing to go home for. I should stay out here, as other men do, and try to follow your advice, and make my life better. A bachelor in China is not necessarily a miserable man!"

Wilfrid was looking towards Mr. Watkins now, to Mr. Watkins who was actually laughing a real, genuine laugh, such as only Mrs. Ratcliff could draw out of him.

"He is very happy," Violet answered, following Kennedy's eyes. "But it is only for two weeks in the year, just the two weeks *she* is here."

A strange thing for a daughter to say; but it did not seem strange to either of them. Kennedy was thinking of his own troubles alone, and vaguely wondering why they now seemed to have sprung up from molehills into mountains. And Violet was thinking—was it only of this stranger woman far away in England, and of the heartache that was threatening her?

"I am so afraid that she will be disappointed in me; in my looks too, as well as in my mind. Don't you think a man changes, and ages, dreadfully in seven years?"

Wilfrid spoke anxiously, as a man speaks who is searching hard to find some, any door of escape from a position he all at once feels to be intolerable.

"You, at your age, cannot have changed nearly so much as you will find she has changed, at hers."

This, which Violet felt to be a brutal truth, very nearly slipped out of her mouth. But she swallowed it down, with a gulp of

shame at her petty spitefulness, and answered, in what was a distinctly unnatural voice :

"If she really loves you, she will not care about your looks. Women don't; I know they don't. Don't fret yourself any more as to what will happen to you. Go home and marry her, and everything will come right."

"Is that what you tell me, Miss Ratcliff? I'll do whatever you say."

And he turned and looked her full in the face.

Luckily for Violet, the moon had just gone behind a cloud. For though she could control her voice, she might not have been able to command her face. And Wilfrid might have seen mirth in it, at the ridiculousness of consulting *her*; or peevishness, at the turn their conversation had taken away from that most interesting of subjects, her own person; or perchance a shadow of sorrow—that sorrow which is too often the fate of a girl whose elders and wisers have not taught her to keep guard over her own heart, lest some passing stranger wound it fatally. The cloud over the moon may have been responsible for many evil hours in two lives.

"Yes, I say go, and I'm sure you won't repent it!"

* * * * * * *

Then, through the darkness, came to them sonorously from the German Baron's chest, with a strong reinforcement from his companions in the chorus, with stampings, and shoutings, and clinking of glasses, the time-immemorial Amoy "birthday" drinking song :—

Und wer im Januar geboren ist,
Steh auf! steh auf! steh auf!
Der nehm' sein Gläschen in die Hand,
Und trink'es aus bis auf den Grund,
Trink' aus! trink' aus! trink' aus!

Here followed a pause, during which the man whose birthday came in January emptied his glass. Then the chorus burst out:—

Hat's gut gemacht! hat's gut gemacht!
D'rum wird Er auch nicht ausgelacht! *

"Ah, I must join in that!" Violet cried. "My birthday is in February; my turn next! Come along, Mr. Kennedy, I can't resist that chorus!"

"Time to be going home, and ending all choruses," chimed in Mr. Watkins from down below. Your mother is tired, Violet, and this is the last night you will have in a level bed for some days to come. You will have rough weather for your trip up to Shanghai; it's going to blow hard to-morrow!"

"That will make you stay, perhaps," Kennedy whispered.

But Violet only answered:

"I hope not. I've made up my mind to go, and I don't want to stay in Amoy any longer!"

Which was an unkind and ungracious thing to say, but one which served Wilfrid Kennedy quite right.

* * * * *

"Very strange Mr. Kennedy didn't come to see you off!" Mrs. Ratcliff said to her daughter as the steamer slipped gently round Kulangsu Island next day, and the various picnic spots passed them by. The mother and the daughter had the deck all to themselves, and Mrs. Ratcliff was actually talking to Violet for the first time since many days. It was a very short-lived chance of talking now; for beyond the outer harbour of Amoy they were to expect "dirty weather," which Mrs. Ratcliff never attempted to face. She would not wait till the crockery in the ship's pantry began to crash and the screw to make endless

* "Let him in January born
Get up upon his legs;
And gently raise his drinking-horn,
And drain it to the dregs.
Drink up! drink up! drink up!"
Chorus. "He's drunk it up, the game old cock!
He shall not be our laughing-stock!"

revolutions in the air, but would go to bed as soon as the steamer was in the open, to live on champagne and all the delicacies that could be provided till Woosung and the mouth of the Shanghai river came in sight.

"I thought you and Mr. Kennedy were such friends," Mrs. Ratcliff went on. "I'm sure he never left your side. A nice-looking, gentlemanly young fellow too. Didn't he ever make love to you, Violet?"

The steamer had come opposite the spot on the island where Mr. Watkins was stationed to make his final signals of farewell. Mrs. Ratcliff vigorously waved her handkerchief in answer; but the part of her year wherein Mr. Watkins was the central figure was over and, so far as her sentiments touching him were concerned, done with. She was already thinking far more of what she was going to do, and to be, in Shanghai than of the "bear with a sore head," as Mrs. Denman would call him that evening, left alone on Kulangsu. Indeed, Wilfrid Kennedy and Violet actually interested her more than her own "friend" at that moment.

"Mr. Kennedy couldn't make love to me," Violet answered bitterly, for she was feeling hurt that Wilfrid had not come to say goodbye. "He is going home to be married."

"Is he really?" Mrs. Ratcliff asked with the eagerest interest. "Who to? Did he shew you her photo? Is she pretty? Where did he meet her?"

"I haven't seen her photo," Violet said crossly. "He was engaged to her before he came out to China, and she's ever so much older than he is!"

"Dear me, what a pity!" cried Mrs. Ratcliff. "But I daresay she has money; there must be some attraction somewhere. I'm sorry all the same for him, for he's a nice young fellow, and it's quite a shame that he has got to sacrifice himself. Just see, Violet, how wrongly the world judges. Mrs. Denman thought

he was in love with you, and that you were in love with him. I knew *you* better, but I wasn't sure of *him*. I thought, and still think, he couldn't trust himself to say goodbye to you. And now he has to go and marry some one else; and even if he hadn't got to marry *her*, he never could have married *you*!"

This was the longest moralisation Violet had ever heard from her mother. It was a consoling one too; not only because it was all about a man whom Violet longed to hear discussed, even should the discussion consist of blame, but also comforting, because it gave a flattering reason for Wilfrid's apparent neglect in not coming on board. Violet would not have been bored if Mrs. Ratcliff had discoursed on the same topic all the way up to Shanghai, some three days or more. But the steamer gave first a pitch, and then a roll, and Chapel Island, outside the harbour, began to grow closer and closer.

"Goodbye, Violet. I'm off!"

And Mrs. Ratcliff clattered down the brass-bound companion, and, heedless of the terrific groans and unearthly sounds that came from her *amah*, already prostrate with sea-sickness, retired to the seclusion of her own cabin.

And Wilfrid Kennedy went his usual way, which no longer led him to the Commissioner's house. But he put Violet's photograph carefully away in his despatch-box, and wasn't quite such good company at a *jambarree* as of old. This fact he excused on the ground of his having been so many years out in China, and laughed at himself as requiring nothing but the sea-voyage to set himself to rights again. And the sea-voyage was only a few weeks off now.

They had a grand gathering the night before he went away, and the German Baron was in full form and voice. But when the time-honoured birthday song was proposed, for the first time since he had come to Amoy, Wilfrid Kennedy made himself disagreeable.

"I hate that song," he said, bluntly. "You all get fearfully flat, as flat as pancakes, in the chorus. If you sing it I shall go."

"You didn't object to it a little while ago," sneered the Baron, who was very angry at being charged with flatness. "And Miss Ratcliff, she liked it too!"

"That doesn't matter to me," Kennedy answered hotly. "If you *will* sing it, goodnight!"

And so they did not.

* * * * * * *

Mrs. Ratcliff had a busy time of it when she got back to Shanghai. First, she had to prepare for her summer trip to the sanatorium of China—Chefoo—which meant any amount of tailors, worry, vexation, stuffs spoiled, meals late, and abundance of strong language from Mr. Ratcliff. The going to Chefoo was a necessity, for Violet's sake. Violet who was losing all her pretty colour, and her appetite, and who seemed to care for nothing but just shutting herself up in her bedroom and reading poetry. Since she had come from Amoy, Violet had taken to reading Byron, not to speak of *In Memoriam*. In consequence of which absorption (for which, it is to be feared, Wilfrid Kennedy was responsible) Violet had become absolutely useless to her mother as regarded the criticism of clothes. She never seemed to know now whether the back of a bodice was crooked or straight, and could no longer be relied upon for the looping of skirts, or even the placing of bonnets. Never was mother more disappointed in a daughter.

And so they went to Chefoo, and Violet Ratcliff's colour came back a brick red, and her hands freckled, and her neck got scarecrowy. The air of China certainly did not suit her.

But as she was the only girl in the Ratcliff "set" she had plenty of admirers, who were allowed to worship her from a distance. For Violet's destiny had long ago been fixed for her by her parents, in one memorable talk with her husband for

which Mrs. Ratcliff had found time just before their daughter came out from home. Violet was to be married to one of Mr. Ratcliff's oldest friends, the *taipan* of Davison, Arkwright and Co., the richest firm in the whole East, and that as soon as the summer was over.

It was a splendid match, in spite of the trifling circumstance that the bridegroom was older than the bride's father. He looked so, too; but then, as Mrs. Ratcliff explained to such of her acquaintances as required the explanation, Violet had never cared for young men, and was far more suited to an older man than to a "boy." To which declaration Violet herself fully agreed.

So there was a very grand wedding in Shanghai, at which Mrs. Ratcliff wore a dress made expressly for the occasion by Worth, and which cost a small fortune. Champagne flowed by the gallon, and the very Chinese servants became wasteful, and indifferent to the amount of pilfering done by "outside" men. And there was a long account of the whole concern in the *London and China Telegraph*, for the benefit of Mr. and Mrs. Ratcliff's and Mr. Davison's old friends and acquaintances at home.

But in the same paper, just underneath the official notice in the "Marriages" column, came another record. And when Violet cut out the announcement that concerned herself, the next one came out too.

"KENNEDY—BARNES.—On December 1st, at the Abbey, Bath, Wilfrid Kennedy, I.M. Customs, China, to Louisa Ellen Barnes."

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

"Kennedy, just look in at that window!"

They had been working late hours in the Custom House at Shanghai, and Kennedy and his old chum Edwards had been kept on this particular evening up to eight o'clock. For Kennedy's two years' leave was over; and when he and his wife had reached Hongkong they had found orders awaiting them to proceed at once to Shanghai, where the Customs office was short-handed and business pressing. And thus it had come about that on the very next day after his arrival, and before he could look out for a house, far less unpack, Wilfrid had been obliged to spend all his time in the office,—which was distinctly hard on him, but harder still on his wife. But then the Shanghai Commissioner was an ultra red-tape martinet, and an anti-English German to boot, while Kennedy was not a "fighting" man.

"Which window?" Wilfrid asked listlessly. He was dreadfully tired, and the motion of the steamer still seemed to jar in his head. He was wishing Edwards, good fellow though he was, anywhere, at the bottom of the river or up on the crosstrees of the British Consulate flag-staff, now at this moment, when the two had just come out into the sweltering steamy air of a Shanghai September night, and when he, Wilfrid, was going home to dine

in the noisy stifling coffee-room of the hotel, where the occupants of the next table to his might be smoking, or staring, or . . . doing any one of those thousand and one things no dweller in the East dreams of being horrified at, but which ladies fresh from Bath take a little time to get accustomed to.

"Which window? Why, the one we are just passing. Look in, and you'll see a picture of domestic felicity."

And Wilfrid Kennedy looked as he was told, and saw:—

A large window, shaded by heavy handsome curtains, the curtains of a rich and prosperous *hong*. The window was wide open, and the room brilliantly lighted. It was a dining-room, and the master and the mistress of the house were sitting at dinner, one at each end of a long elaborately decorated table. They were quite alone, nor were there any signs of other guests having been expected. They had not yet finished their meal, but it was not what they were eating that was interesting Edwards, and to which he was drawing Wilfrid Kennedy's attention.

Before each of the two diners lay an open book, out of which they were complacently reading. They read as they ate, and when, on their laying down their knives and forks, their plates were swiftly changed by the "boys" in attendance, they still went on reading. Neither took the faintest notice of the other's presence.

Almost unconsciously, the two men outside had stood still to look in, and Kennedy had to pull his friend by the sleeve, lest perchance one of the two diners—the husband it must have been, for he sat facing the window—should see them. For the dining-room happened to be just at an angle of the house, which here touched the Bund, the great Shanghai Bund along the river.

"They are always like that," whispered Edwards as they moved slowly away. "Every time I pass that window, if they are at dinner, they are always reading. I've never once seen either of them take any notice of the other. How ghastly it

must be for their digestions!—or rather for *his*. I don't suppose Mrs. Davison is old enough to have a digestion yet."

"Who are they?" Kennedy asked with a sudden catch up of his breath. "What *hong* is it?"

"The Davisons of Davison Arkwright—surely you know the *hong*? Didn't you notice it this morning? It's a magnificent house, built from a design by some swell architect. Ah, I forgot; you've never been stationed in Shanghai before. But you must have heard of old Davison, even if you haven't already heard of his wife. He married her two years ago, a girl young enough be his granddaughter. Surely you have heard the whole story? Mrs. Davison is a daughter of Mrs. Ratcliff that was, the Mrs. Ratcliff they used to call the beauty of China. Mrs. Davison, by the way, isn't a patch on her!"

"I have met them, both the mother and the daughter," Kennedy struck in. For though he felt a strong desire to get from his friend Edwards that fuller information which is the privilege of the stranger, it would not have been prudent to allow the impression to remain that he did not already know Mrs. Davison. "I met them in Amoy two years ago. They were staying with the Commissioner."

"Watkins, wasn't it? He comes into the story too. Mr. Ratcliff married his daughter to old Davison, and then went smash. What do you think of that? The old rogue must have known what was going to happen, and you may guess if Davison wasn't sold! For he was not a marrying man, you know, and it didn't suit his household arrangements at all to have a Ratcliff without a penny to her name on his hands. Well, Mrs. Ratcliff found out she must go home and see some aged aunt, or cousin, and who should escort her but Mr. Watkins? He had made his pile, had Watkins, so he resigned the service, and was just going to enjoy himself when he stupidly died, and left Mrs. Ratcliff everything. Old Ratcliff then went home; there was a grand

reconciliation, and the two are living like fighting-cocks, they tell me, in the charming nest Watkins had prepared for himself. Upon my word, Kennedy, the cheek some people have!" Here he put his head closer to Wilfrid's, and imparted some items of Club "gup" which would have scandalised horribly more liberal-minded ladies than Mrs. Wilfrid Kennedy, for instance.

"But all this has nothing to do with Mrs. Davison, has it? What do people say of her?"

A very rash question this was, as Wilfrid knew even before the answer came. What could that answer be but a painful one, in view of that window? And Kennedy disliked pain, mental or otherwise, even more than he disliked hard work.

"Mrs. Davison? Oh, she's just such another as her mother, or will be in time. But there's some excuse for her,—tied, sold if you like it, to that pompous old beast. He used to be a very well known figure in certain walks of society in Shanghai. Mrs. Davison doesn't waste her time in being agreeable to him, does she? But the saying goes that she only married Davison because she was jilted, or something of the kind. At any rate there's no doubt that she has made no pretence of loving her husband, either when she was married or since. In love with some one else; the old yarn! No, she isn't very popular, not nearly so popular as her mother used to be. As for him, he's a stuck-up old idiot. I'd like to have the kicking of him!"

This idea was probably suggested to Edwards' mind by a jinricksha coolie who had just dropped the shafts of his vehicle invitingly but perilously across his path. In the absence of Mr. Davison, the young man contented himself with administering a sound kick to the Celestial, after which he cheerfully bade Kennedy goodnight.

And Wilfrid took a few steps more in the direction of his hotel. Then he turned sharp round, and walked straight back towards the Custom House, until he came to that dining-room window.

He had two reasons for taking this extra walk. First, his head ached ; and second, he wanted to look at Violet Davison all by himself. And this might be the only available opportunity for some time to come.

They had finished dinner now, and Mr. Davison, the "pompous old beast," was abandoning himself to an enormous cheroot in in a very large armchair. There was a good deal of him to abandon, and he was doing so in a comfortable but distinctly inelegant fashion. For the rest, he looked the typical *taipan* of the good old days, with a bald shining head, a good breadth of waistcoat, and a short thick red neck suggestive of apoplexy. Clearly not a husband to fall desperately in love with; clearly not such a husband as his own wife ought to have chosen.

His wife!—was she indeed the Violet Ratcliff he had known, and remembered too, all these years, as without any exception the very nicest girl he had ever met, the only girl, indeed woman, who was worth remembering? Was he really looking at her face now?

For Mrs. Davison's face was no longer hidden from view. She was standing close to the window, so close that if she had only looked down, and perhaps back in her memory, she must have recognised her old friend.

But, how the two years had changed her! How ill, how worn she looked! The healthy colour was gone, the roundness of the face and figure, with the "school-girlishness" of the Amoy days. Mrs. Davison had perhaps gained dignity from being a *taipan's* wife, for at any rate she looked self-reliant and determined. But to Wilfrid Kennedy's eyes she also looked miserable.

And he stood there, and gazed, and took in with a sorrowful surprise that the Violet Ratcliff of his recollection was something past and dead, and that the Violet Davison he was going to know might be very charming, very friendly, but must stand on a footing quite different from that of old days. And he thought

in his mind, as he slowly turned homewards, that it was altogether a mistake ever again to come across some one who has made a great impression on you in past years. For it is pitiful to see, or to fancy one sees, that as regards happiness, if not looks, Time does not always "bear gently on those we love."

CHAPTER II.

"Mr. Kennedy, you *are* a nice one! Actually going to cut me, an old acquaintance!"

It was a few days after the Kennedys' arrival in Shanghai, and just after office hours. And it was Mrs. Denman of Amoy fame who was barring Wilfrid's way. She was coming straight out of the Astor House where she had, presumably, just been to call upon Wilfrid's wife. For the Kennedys were still in that most miserable strait betwixt two, vulgarly called living in boxes, though the move into their own house was to come off before very long.

But, though Wilfrid of course knew the Denmans were now stationed in Shanghai, as he could not help knowing when he saw Mr. Denman every day at the Custom House, he had failed to notice the smart little brougham with the *mafoos* in official caps drawn up at the hotel gate. He had, moreover, failed to notice the elegant little lady with the fluffy golden hair and (alas for English complexions!) powdered face, who was coming out of the porch, tinkling, by reason of her many bracelets, like the apostolic cymbal, the admired of a group of American "globe-trotters" just outside the central door of the hotel.

"Mrs. Denman! I beg your pardon! I didn't recognise you!"

"That's not very complimentary," laughed Mrs. Denman, keeping her position in the middle of the path. "But I suppose I must have changed in these two years or more since we met. Heighho! we're all growing old! All except you, Mr. Kennedy, you've grown younger since you were married!"

Lucky for Mrs. Denman that she had got the name for saying the most ill-timed things without ever meaning them! Lucky, too, that she was saying them to Wilfrid Kennedy without any witnesses present. Even he, good-natured fellow though he was, felt himself flushing up as Mrs. Denman went on to say :—

"I've just been to call on your wife. Of course I was dying to see her directly I heard you were coming to Shanghai. I wanted to know what kind of a wife a man like you would choose, because in Amoy we all thought—But no matter!"

Mrs. Denman suddenly checked herself and realised that she was the cynosure of the porch. She moved slowly towards her brougham.

"I wanted to see you as well as Mrs. Kennedy," she said. "You ought to have come in sooner. I want you to come to see me and have a chat about old times. There are some old friends in Shanghai, too, do you know that? When will you come? Say to tiffin on Sunday; I'll write Mrs. Kennedy a *chit*. Tiffin at 12 sharp, and we can talk afterwards."

A very ordinary China coast invitation, seeing Sunday was the only free day for the Customs staff. What then was Mrs. Denman's astonishment when Wilfrid answered, in an exceedingly embarrassed voice :

"Thank you very much, but I'm afraid we can't come. The fact of the matter is, my wife won't go anywhere on Sunday!"

Mrs. Denman was so amazed that she blurted out :—

"You don't mean to say you've married a missionary?"

Judging by the expression on her countenance, missionary and leper were about synonymous to Mrs. Denman.

"Oh no, she isn't a missionary," Wilfrid tried to explain. "Only she's been brought up very religiously (I was too, you know), and has still got home-views on the Sabbath. She'll lose them in time, but not quite at first. And I don't want you to shock her, Mrs. Denman. You've often shocked me, you remember!"

Which winding-up gratified Mrs. Denman immensely, and sent her off in the most friendly of moods towards Wilfrid. She smiled and nodded to him out of the carriage window as long as she could see him,—and then threw herself back in her seat and mentally contemplated the situation which had just been placed before her.

What a curious, ill-assorted marriage this must be, to be sure, the more you looked into it! Mrs. Denman had of course seen the announcement in the newspapers, and had lamented the fact before she had any reason for so doing,—simply because it upset a nice little romance she had woven in her brain. Then the Denmans had been ordered to Shanghai, and there Mrs. Denman had been thrown a good deal together with Violet Davison, who, poor girl, wanted a woman-friend badly in her new life.

Violet Davison, as a rich merchant's wife, was of course one of the leaders of Shanghai society. In that exclusive "upper ten" she now moved, which barely knew of the existence of a Deputy-Commissioner of Customs, and for which, in those good old golden days, Consular and Customs Assistants were naught and as the small dust of the balance. A pompous, interminably lengthy-dinnered, mentally-empty set they were, those *taipans*, who thought the world existed for their benefit alone, and that to take a lady down to dinner and to address an occasional platitude to her—only and solely in between the courses—was the greatest honour that lady could receive. But the world of Shanghai took them at their own valuation, and Mrs. Denman was cordially hated

by all those who were not so fortunate as to be admitted within the sacred circle.

Mrs. Denman's friendship with Violet Davison, which had somewhat astonished Mr. Davison at first, was really the most natural thing in the world. There was something in the Deputy-Commissioner's wife which invited confidences, even though the confiding party knew that what she was so foolish as to tell would certainly not remain locked up within Mrs. Denman's breast. Violet was one of those wholly unself-controlled girls who cannot keep their grievances to themselves. Her early married life was one of rude disillusionment, and when at the age of five months her baby died, and Mrs. Denman came to sympathise and lament with and console her, Violet completely broke down. Secrets that were, alas! no secrets to the rest of Shanghai, but which a proud wife should have held up as a barrier between the mocking world and herself—these came out; and with these secrets of her married life a half-confession of her girlish days. There was such a relief, such a feeling akin to joy, in saying once more a name which pride had never let her say before, in explaining how *she* alone was responsible for what Mrs. Denman had actually called to her face,—to Violet's, who had told him to go,—Wilfrid's desertion! Even the after-reproaches of prudence, that by speaking as she had done she had put herself into Mrs. Denman's power, were silenced by a remembrance of the satisfaction it had been to watch the changes, from interest to astonishment, from astonishment to the tears of over-wrought feeling, in Mrs. Denman's face.

And for once Mrs. Denman had held her tongue, and kept Violet's secret. Indeed, she did not consider the story Violet had told her worth retailing, since Mrs. Davison would probably have half-a-dozen such experiences in half that number of years, and coupled with Shanghai names also,—which would be far more interesting to the people of that Model Settlement.

Mrs. Denman had in general a very small opinion of the constancy of women's affections. On at least five separate occasions she had been firmly convinced that she herself and some particularly intimate chum of her husband's were about to figure in the newspapers. And the sequel to such imaginations had invariably been some utterly commonplace drifting apart, such as a transfer to another port, the advent of another rival, male or female, the getting tired of each other, etc. etc. Taught by these experiences, Mrs. Denman had at length arrived at the conclusion that her own husband, a big, hulking, good-natured fellow over six feet, was as good as any other man,—in short, that all men were so alike that there was no palpable advantage to be got out of a change of spouse. Violet would doubtless have her five, maybe her six or seven, occasions of falling in love. The Kennedy episode was the first, but it would distinctly not be the last. Her last love must be, if not Mr. Davison himself, at any rate his comfortable establishment.

Still, when Mrs. Denman heard of the Kennedys' arrival, and still more, when she saw what Mrs. Kennedy was like, she certainly scented possible complications ahead. That is, she felt convinced that what Violet had told her about Wilfrid's confession in Amoy had been true (of the details of which confession she had naturally been sceptical up to the present time); and, furthermore, that there must be a distinct incompatibility of temperament between Wilfrid and his wife.

"A prim old maid, who won't see forty in a hurry again," Mrs. Denman summed Mrs. Kennedy up. "That boy, that child, tied to her for life! Truly money is the root of all evil!"

And to guard against the possible effects of that evil, Mrs. Denman stopped her carriage at the most fashionable store in the place, and relieved her mind by adding several items to her already heavy bill.

But she could not altogether banish the thought of "that

boy" and his "missionary-looking" wife. Mrs. Denman had always felt it to be her mission in life to afford relief to distressed partners in matrimony. Was the husband the aggrieved party? She allowed him to fall love with herself. Was it the wife? She must be thrown together with some trusted friend of the male persuasion with whom she might strike up a Platonic friendship. But as regarded Violet Davison and Wilfrid Kennedy, would it be wise, would it be even safe, to put them together? Mrs. Denman tried hard to think "yes"; but she was not altogether easy on the subject in her own mind by the time she reached home.

And Wilfrid Kennedy went up the stairs and into his own room with a light heart. He had made the plunge, and had asserted his true position with his old acquaintances. It would have been easy enough to have made an excuse for this one Sunday tiffin; in olden times Wilfrid most assuredly would have done so. But, how much easier would life be for him now that he had spoken out! No one would titter when they saw him carrying his wife's prayer-book to Church next Sunday. They would have done their tittering in the week, when—

"How late you are, Wilfrid! You promised to be home at a quarter past four, and it is a quarter to five! I have been watching you for the last ten minutes talking to that—what's her name?—Mrs. Denman. I cannot think how any one making a pretence to be a lady can go about dressed as she is, and stand and talk where everybody is staring at her. What an example to the heathen round her! No wonder they think their worship of idols is better than our religion, since the English ladies in China are *their* specimens of Christian women! Poor women, indeed! with no thought beyond dress, no conversation but balls!"

Mrs. Kennedy spoke rather loud, as though she was addressing a large audience. This inconvenient habit had grown upon her during the last few years of her maiden life, and its cause had been the deafness of both her parents. Still it was very mortifying

to Wilfrid to now feel certain that every word had been heard, and that every dangerous comment on Mrs. Denman would probably be treasured up for future repetition by that arrant gossip Tom Edwards, who had followed him up the stairs, and who now stood at the door awaiting permission to enter to pay his duty-call.

CHAPTER III.

"Flossie, who is that awful frump sitting in the second row, next to the Commissioner? No, on the other side. Who can she be? I don't know the face at all."

The Davisons were, of course, occupying the best box at the *Lyceum* at the first performance of an especially strong theatrical troupe which was passing through Shanghai. And there, in front of the box, Violet Davison and her friend Mrs. Denman were quizzing the people down below them, to the great delight of two youthful swains in close attendance. Mr. Davison, in a stiff white waistcoat of prodigious latitude, sat in the centre of the box, condescension to the stage and to society in general radiating from him in all directions. Mr. Denman was smoking a cigar outside.

"That? oh, don't you know? It's the bride, the wife of Wilfrid Kennedy of our service."

"*No*!"

Violet's face had flushed crimson, and she hastily put up her opera-glasses again, as if to take a good look at the unconscious stranger. But her hand shook ominously, and Mrs. Denman was not astonished to see her put the glasses down carelessly, right on the ledge of the box, plant her elbows, and give

herself up to a long and steady stare at the second row of stalls.

Yes, Mrs. Kennedy *did* look a frump. She was dressed—and this in the days when all the world wore frills, furbelows, and ornaments—in a most unbecomingly simple manner. Small wonder Mrs. Denman had set her down as a missionary. Her hair, sandy and painfully, *i.e.* stickily, smooth, was plastered over her ears and then screwed into the most diminutive "Grecian" knot behind. Her dress, of plainest black silk, was ornamented simply by a huge black enamel locket, of the warming-pan type, fastened round her neck with narrow purple ribbons, which fell down her back considerably below her waist. A regular old maid.

As yet her face was invisible; for, although the performance had not yet begun, she kept her eyes rigidly fixed on the drop-curtain. Violet took up the glasses again, and looked along the row.

There *he* was, sitting quite at the end, looking vacantly round the gallery. He had begun at the opposite end to Violet's box, and was working his way towards it. Changed was he? Yes, surely; but not for the better. He was not so trim as he used to be; he looked discontented; he looked infinitely tired. He was paying no attention to what his neighbour, a fashionably dressed young matron, was saying to him. No, he certainly did not look happy; and Violet felt actually glad he did not.

And then, just at that moment, just as his eyes were reaching her box, the orchestra struck up "We met, 'twas in a crowd," and Violet's opera-glasses fell from her hands down, right down among the people who were sitting below. And at the crash Mrs. Kennedy turned her head.

Hers was by no means an unpleasant, though it was an unsympathetic face. It was round and fairly plump, though candour forces the admission that when Mrs. Denman compared

her complexion with the rind of a pumelo, and the consistency of her cheeks with an over-ripe persimmon, she did not greatly overshoot the mark. The expression of this distinctly homely countenance, in which both eyes and nose were quite unimportant landmarks, was that of resigned martyrdom. Mrs. Kennedy evidently had not come to the theatre to enjoy herself. (As a matter of fact, she was there under a mistake, and solely as the Commissioner's dinner-guest.)

All this Violet missed, all, everything and everybody, in the new and curious sensation that seized her, and made her lose, for the time being, all consciousness of her surroundings. Wilfrid Kennedy's eyes were fixed on her, as were those of the whole theatre. But the look in his eyes was one she saw nowhere else, and it only lasted a short part of a minute. But Mrs. Denman caught it as well, and she hastily bent forward and whispered to her friend:—

"Everyone is looking at you, Violet."

The warning was enough. Wilfrid Kennedy did not manage to catch Violet's eye again all that evening.

CHAPTER IV.

"I am going to call on the Kennedys, Flossie."

"No, don't. I beg you not to, Violet."

Violet had come in for a quiet cup of tea and chat with her friend. Mrs. Denman had issued orders of "No got" to the *boy*,—very necessary orders, as the almost continuous stopping of carriages and ringing of the doorbell shewed. The Denmans were popular in Shanghai, although Mr. Watkins' old designation of Flossie as "giggling goose" still clung to that little lady.

"Why not?"

A, for Violet, wonderfully disingenuous question, to which she already knew the answer, an answer she was not likely to get out of Mrs. Denman.

"You will make a very great mistake if you try to cultivate Mrs. Kennedy," Flossie Denman answered. "She is really a terrible woman! She's frightfully religious, and has come to China with the intention of converting all the natives at one fell swoop. I believe she's got serious designs on the Emperor's seraglio, not to say his heart! And so, of course, she wouldn't have anything to do with us worldly people. You should have heard Tom Edwards imitating her going for me—poor, innocent, harmless ME—to her own meek goose of a husband. Tom heard

it all the other side of the street, for she bawls, my dear. Now, don't call on her; she'll ask you about your soul. Why, she even tackled the Commissioner!"

"Well, I don't expect she got much out of him," Violet remarked languidly. "She must be rather amusing, I think. But can't her husband keep her in order?"

"Mr. Kennedy? You know him of old; he could never say Bo to a goose! I've no patience with that kind of man! A man who lets himself be made the laughing-stock of all Shanghai, and why? Simply because *she* holds the purse-strings, and *he* hasn't a cent to bless himself with. Went home over head and ears in debt, married for money, and hasn't begun to pay up yet. A most contemptible man!"

Mrs. Denman kept her face steadily turned away until just towards the end of her speech. Then she stole a glance out of the corner of one eye at Violet, to see the effect she had produced.

Not the right one, alas! Violet was impatiently biting her under lip, and one foot was restlessly beating time, swinging in the air just above the fender. These signs might have stood for disgust and disappointment in any one else; but they did not in the present case. For down the cheek that was nearest to Mrs. Denman there was stealing—was it possible?—a tear.

Mrs. Denman was angry. Violet was quite too ridiculous about this man. She took up her parable again.

"If you called and became intimate with them (which you couldn't do without mortally offending the Rodneys, and the Harrisons, and the de Clancys, who are all senior to Mr. Kennedy in the service, and on whom you never called), you would have to invite these Kennedys and they would invite you back. Fancy Mr. Davison at their house! No wine on the table; only tea to drink. The minute after tea, if you please, out comes the Bible, each one is made to read a verse round, and then come prayers. Positively, that's what happened to Mr. Edwards when

Mr. Kennedy invited him in to potluck. He told me he was so faint, so thirsty, and so stiff he could scarcely drag his limbs home!"

"Haven't you got any better authority than Mr. Edwards?" Violet asked sarcastically. "I wonder how he describes other people's entertainments!"

Mrs. Denman made no answer. She was, in truth, flabbergasted at Violet's retort.

"Flossie," Violet said suddenly, bending over and laying her hand caressingly on Mrs. Denman's knee, "you haven't convinced me; you can't convince me. Why is he so weak, so, what you call contemptible? I know; I can understand it. And if this silly, foolish woman is estranging all his friends, and making his life a misery to him, am I, who was his first friend, who knew all his secrets, am *I* going to stand by and not give him a helping hand? No, ten thousand times no! If all you say is true (and I had heard most of it already), then he wants all the comfort he can get from knowing *I* have not changed. For *his* sake, I will make a friend of his wife!"

"You are absolutely cracked, Violet," Mrs. Denman calmly replied, "and, what is more, you are dangerously cracked. You delude yourself into the idea that to know you will have a soothing effect on Wilfrid Kennedy's poor tried nerves. It can only have one effect, if you go into this concern with your head so completely on fire. That's a bad one. I don't need to explain it to you."

"You mean," Violet answered, "that Mrs. Kennedy will be jealous of me. But she won't be. I shan't clash with her in the least. You'll see; I shall come out of this all right!"

"But I'm not thinking of *Mrs.* Kennedy!" urged Mrs. Denman. "You couldn't move her one way or another so as to affect *my* peace of mind. But, to be frank with you, Violet, what will you do if Mr. Kennedy won't go back to the

old conditions, if he is afraid of making a friend of you, lest he should again fall in love with you? For he was in love, and you know it. That's one possibility you have got to face. Or, suppose he does go back, and consults you and confides in you again, and ends by falling in love with you,—what will you do then?"

"I'll think about those things when the time arrives!" Violet answered evasively. "But you must help me, Flossie. You must take me to call on this dragon. When will you go?"

"Have you asked Mr. Davison's leave yet?"

"Ask *his* leave?" Violet said scornfully. "Do I ever ask his leave? When do I ever see him, or wish to see him, to ask? You know quite well we have agreed never to see each other except at meals or in company. No; he goes his own way, and I mean to go mine."

"Hoity-toity! my lady is on her high horse!"

But even as Mrs. Denman uttered these words, her heart smote her, and by the very decided way in which she blew her nose, and then clattered the tea-cups, Violet knew that there was no further need for argument.

CHAPTER V.

"Whose writing is that, Louisa?"

Wilfrid knew very well whose it was all the time. He had often seen it before; he had even got a specimen of it locked away in his despatch box.

Mrs. Kennedy was wrestling with her house-accounts, and so was in a bad temper. It is the destiny, not to be evaded by any housekeeper in the East, of the foreign mistress to be "squeezed" by her servants. That means, the native servants in each household make up their minds that so much of their masters' income is to find its way into their own pockets. And find its way it will, whether the master lives in luxury or in poverty-stricken destitution of the good things of this life. Appreciating which fact, the worldly-wise among the foreign ladies insist on their servants providing them with the best of everything. Nor do they spend a cent more, according to their means, than do other ladies in their own station of life who diligently enquire into last day's potatoes, amounts of sugar, butter, or who buy their fish and game at its real market value.

But Mrs. Kennedy disapproved of "squeezes"; and, under the guidance of one of the crack housekeepers of Shanghai, had found out all about market prices, and was determined to pay

no more than what was just and lawful. The Kennedy servants, however, knew how to deal with a recalcitrant housekeeper like their mistress. The boy's accounts lay before her now, totalling up to an unjust amount, under such items as "brooms," "mend-buckets," and "firewood" in sufficient quantity to stock an entire shop. And when the existence of these articles was challenged, they had all, wonderful to say, been produced, and now lay piled up, a most unsightly mass, in the very middle of the drawing-room floor.

"Whose writing? I don't remember. Look at the note for yourself."

Mrs. Kennedy did not waste her time in being courteous to her husband. It was so difficult for her to realise how changed their relations to each other were since the days when Wilfrid was a little boy and she a grown-up young lady! So difficult to realise that, though he was so much younger than she was, yet he was her husband, and as such might shake off her unlawful authority some day. And what a day would that be, in the case of a nature like Wilfrid's! She was drawing the rein even now dangerously tight.

"Have you answered this *chit*, Louisa?"

"Of course I have," she answered testily. "I wish you wouldn't come and ask me questions when you see I am busy! By the way, Wilfrid, you *must* send away the boy. I simply refuse to keep him any longer. When you were so late coming home last night I went down into the cookhouse, and there I found a crowd of Chinese all busy over some idolatrous rites. They were making some horrible sticky sort of paste on my beautiful new pastryboard, for their idols to eat, if you please. Of course I said it must be all thrown away. And the *boy* refused to do so! He said:—'Chinaman one year one time must makey so fashion.' Well, if he *must*, he shan't do it here, and so I told him. And he actually answered me:—'Master savvey what

thing!' I've slept over the matter, and now I've made up my mind. You must dismiss the boy."

He was Wilfrid's last and only link with the old life, this boy who had lived with him in all the bad, unhealthy ports he had ever been stationed in, and who had so often tended him when he was sick. He had been doomed for some weeks, Wilfrid knew; and probably there was a smug-faced, oily-mouthed *protégé* of some friend of Mrs. Kennedy ready to step into his billet. What was the use of defending this Chinaman any more? Bachelors' boys never do manage to get on with a foreign lady in the house.

"Very well, Louisa. Did you accept this invitation?"

"Mrs. Davison's invitation? No, I didn't. I refused it."

Mrs. Kennedy had a peculiar way of pursing up her lips when a dangerous topic was being touched upon. Her lips were pursed up now.

"Any reason?" Wilfrid asked carelessly. "I thought you told me the other day, after she had called, that you liked Mrs. Davison very much, and that"——

"Well, what else did I say?" demanded Mrs. Kennedy, fixing her eyes on her husband's face.

"I don't remember exactly," Wilfrid answered a little hotly. "But what have you got against her now? She's the wife of the leading man in Shanghai, and she goes out of her way to call on you, and then to invite you to dinner. May I ask why, without even consulting me, you have refused?"

"I would rather not give you my reasons, Wilfrid; but I have them, and if you insist on it, I will give them. But I'd rather not continue the subject."

Mrs. Kennedy got up from her writing-table, and seated herself in a comfortable armchair near the fire, all ready to be asked. In truth, she had foreseen this episode, and had left the *chit* lying about in order to attract Wilfrid's attention.

"I *do* insist, Louisa."

For one short moment Mrs. Kennedy looked up at him in what was astonishment. She did not know that voice; but the look reassured her. Wilfrid's eyes were as soft, as submissive, she thought, as ever.

But she did not know what words, ringing in his ears still, were calling up that soft look. They were Violet's words, when he had taken her out to her carriage after her first call.

"I hope your wife will like me, Mr. Kennedy. She looks so good, and I want her dreadfully to be friends with me!"

And he had gone back, with a delicious warmth at his heart, and had repeated them to his wife, and she had smiled, and looked pleased. What had come now?

"I will not go to the house of any woman, I will not accept her hospitality, I will have nothing to do with her,—so long as she is living in open sin!"

"In open sin? Mrs. Davison living in open sin? What *do* you mean, Louisa?"

The idea was too utterly ludicrous, absurd even beyond a laugh. Wilfrid felt a great weight lifted from his heart. His wife evidently had no glimmering of what might have proved an objection,—his old acquaintance with Violet.

But Mrs. Kennedy pursed up her lips tighter.

"What tag-end of gossip have you got? Who put such an idea into your head? Is that your Christianity, to believe lies about people?"

Wilfrid was getting angry now, and was not stopping to measure his words.

"Explain yourself, Louisa, if you make accusations against my friends."

Ah! there the point came in: she was his friend. Mrs. Kennedy was already half-suspecting that would-be friend of hers: her old-maidish prudery, which but thinly concealed her old-maidish love for dubious stories, was flung aside at once.

"No, it was none of my Christian friends, as you sneeringly call them, who told me of *your* 'friend.' They, forsooth, are not good enough for her, I suppose, and they don't trouble to speak, far less think of her. It was Mrs. Davison's own particular friend, Mrs. Denman, who told me, and told me not as against Mrs. Davison at all. On the contrary, she looks upon her as a martyr. A martyr, with carriages and horses, and luxury,—the wages of sin forsooth!"

Mrs. Kennedy seized the poker, and stirred the fire as viciously as though she was performing the task for Violet's spirit in the Chinese Purgatory.

"What was it Mrs. Denman told you?"

Again Mrs. Kennedy stole a look at Wilfrid. But he had turned his back on her, and was examining the blotting-book on the writing-table.

"She told me that Mrs. Davison's had been a most miserable marriage, that she had been forced into it before she was old enough to know her own mind. And, could you believe it, this Mr. Davison, this great merchant, is in reality, and has always been, a most abandoned, sinful man? The life he led before his marriage it made me blush to hear of. I am sure, quite sure, that if only half of what Mrs. Denman said is true, he would never be received into respectable society at home. It must be only because he is so rich that he is not cut by the whole community here!"

There was absolute triumph in Mrs. Kennedy's voice. She did not wait for comment from Wilfrid, but went on:—

"And I do not pity a woman who, knowing her husband is what Mr. Davison is, knowing his past, and his present too, yet goes on living in his house, despising and hating him all the time. And so I told Mrs. Denman quite straight. And what was her excuse for having told me all these horrible particulars? That she had only done so to let me see how deeply Mrs. Davison was to be pitied, in spite of all her wealth, and to make me take

an interest in her! 'Interest? Mrs. Denman?' I answered, 'How can I take any interest in her now? To my mind 'Mrs. Davison has a plain duty before her, and she shrinks from 'doing it. As long as she lives with her husband, she tacitly 'consents to his life, past and present. She ought to leave him, 'and go back to her father's house.' 'How can she?' Mrs. Denman said, 'She's his wife. She must stay with him. 'Her own parents are thousands of miles away. And you are 'wrong in judging so hardly of Mr. Davison. He's no worse 'than heaps of others, as you ought to know.' 'I only judge by 'what you yourself have told me,' I said, 'and my judgment is 'that Mrs. Davison is wrong, and if she asks me I shall tell her 'so. And she said—'

Was it a groan that came from the writing-table? Mrs. Kennedy shifted her chair uneasily. And just then Wilfrid stood up and came to the fire.

"And so, because Mr. Davison makes his wife's life miserable, you refuse your friendship to a girl who has done you the kindness to offer you hers!"

Unwise words and unwise scorn! Mrs. Kennedy was ready for the fight at once.

"You may call things by wrong names as much as you like!" she retorted, "but you can't blind my eyes to what is right and to what is downright wrong! I feel, I know, Mrs. Davison is not a fit person for me to make a friend of, and so I intend to have nothing to do with her at all. I don't change my principles because I happen to live in China instead of in England."

"And have you told Mrs. Davison all this? Or have you left her friend, Mrs. Denman, to tell her?"

The withering contempt in Wilfrid's voice was too much for Mrs. Kennedy's temper.

"I will not stand this cross-examination any more!" she

cried angrily, her lips trembling with passion. "Find out for yourself if you want to know!"

And then, to her utter amazement, Wilfrid answered :—

"I will."

He had gone out of the drawing-room and out of the house before she had sufficiently recovered to call him back. And though she tried to think this was only a vague threat, and that his going only meant it was office-time (which she knew it was not), yet she felt uncomfortable all the rest of the afternoon with a shadowy suspicion that she had somehow or other gone too far. Nor did Wilfrid's reappearance, not very far from his usual time, satisfy her. For he merely came to tell her he was dining that evening at the Club, having to attend an important Committee meeting there afterwards.

Mrs. Kennedy had never dined alone before. But this first solitary meal was not destined to be the last.

CHAPTER VI.

Never, in all his life, from his earliest years up, had Wilfrid Kennedy been so utterly angry as he was when he left his house that afternoon.

He was angry beyond control, either of words or of deeds. He could not have trusted himself to listen to that loud self-righteous voice a moment longer. What manner of woman was this he had married?

He forgot, utterly forgot, his wife's total ignorance of the wicked ways of the great world, quite forgot that she had been brought up amongst those who, never having been tried themselves, have no sympathy with the temptations of others. He could not think of an excuse for her; indeed he did not want to think of her at all. There was no room in his thoughts for any one but Violet, poor, poor Violet, to whom life had been nothing but a great disillusioning, from whom everything good had been taken away, and whom, instead of pitying, his own wife condemned, and condemned for the very reason she should have pitied her.

How could Mrs. Denman, Violet's friend, have made such a frightful mistake as to tell Mrs. Kennedy anything about Violet's inner life? And how was Wilfrid going to make the wrong right?

What wrong, indeed? Now that his anger was dying away

into this great pity for Violet, Wilfrid could begin to reason clearly, and it did not take very long for him to feel convinced that as yet Mrs. Kennedy could scarcely have done much harm. She might have, possibly, worded her refusal of Mrs. Davison's invitation ungraciously, but she could hardly have given any reasons for refusing. Mrs. Denman—truly a goose, and a cackling, mischievous one too—, was she likely to repeat that conversation he had just heard? No, ten thousand times no!

The danger was all ahead, and Wilfrid's course was clear. It was to warn Violet to keep out of his wife's way. They need never meet again; Shanghai was large enough for that. He must keep them apart, even though this meant keeping himself apart also.

And he must lose no time over giving his warning. He would see either Violet or Mrs. Denman that very afternoon, after office-hours.

It was very nearly office-time now, and he had been walking in an opposite direction to the Custom House. He must get back to it as soon as he could. Which was the shortest way?

Here he was, close to the (then) Cemetery gate. Through it lay his shortest way. Kennedy pushed the gate open, and walked in.

How quiet it all was in here, passing in from the noise and din of the busy street! The coolies grunting to each other as they carried their loads down towards the Bund; the squeaking of the ungreased wheelbarrows; the wrangling of two shrill-voiced women close outside;—all seemed to melt away into a single clash of sound, in which Wilfrid had no longer share or part. He, in the world, was outside the world, there, amongst those trees, amongst those sleepers, the very remembrance of whom had mostly faded away.

Only mostly, though. Here was one grave, one tiny grave, that was being tended even then. It did not lie near the main

path, but near that side one he had chosen. It was a child's grave, and the child's mother was bending over it.

The very woman, too, he had to seek, to find, and to warn against his own wife! How could he do so here, in this most sacred spot in all the world to her? Wilfrid turned on his heel, trying to beat a retreat as softly as possible. Alas for badly-seasoned boots! There was a most hideous squeak, and Violet had caught sight of him.

"Mr. Kennedy! Mr. Kennedy! I wanted to see you so much!"

All the colour left Wilfrid's face as a horrible fear sprang up in him. Was he then too late? Had she heard already?

Violet had risen from her knees, and came straight up to him.

"Mr. Kennedy," she said, and then stopped. What she had to say was evidently difficult, for she nervously twisted her bracelet (the old Chinese golden rope that he remembered so well) round and round.

"Mr. Kennedy, Mrs. Denman has told me——"

"Has told you," Wilfrid broke in, "what I don't think, and never have thought, and never can think! No, nor any one else whose opinion is worth having! But why did she tell you? I wanted to spare you this."

"You couldn't," Violet answered sadly. "I must have known it sooner or later. But you know me better!" she cried out, lifting her eyes suddenly to his face. "You believe in me always, don't you?"

Why did not the sky suddenly fall, or the ground open under their feet, or Providence, so ready to interfere when not wanted, separate those two at that moment? For with Violet's eyes, all full of unshed tears, and Violet's pretty lips quivering, and with the unguardedness of spirit his great anger had left in Wilfrid, there was only one answer possible to that question. And it was an answer that did not need to be expressed in words.

"Believe in you, darling? I only wish I were able not to believe,—not to think and dream of you every day, every night, ever since I first knew you!"

It was all out before he could stop himself, whispered into her ear with his arm round her neck. How sweet it was to touch her! Wilfrid forgot whether it was wrong, forgot where he was, forgot all his obligations, forgot even the possible presence of coolies, fellow-citizens, servants and all. The only thing he was conscious of was that the lips he was kissing were Violet's, and that she was as much his own in heart as though they two were free, with the whole wide world and life before them.

CHAPTER VII.

Where indeed was the wrong in it all?

Mrs. Denman had argued the whole matter out to herself, and she could not see where it lay. Conventionally, socially, she admitted, Wilfrid and Violet were very wrong — unjustifiable. But morally, as before that higher tribunal of right and wrong where Mrs. Denman's affections and prejudices sat as judges, the two were absolved.

Mr. Kennedy had a most objectionable wife, an odious woman, who made his life a misery to him. It was unreasonable to expect him to put up with her ways; so he was justified in striking out into a new path for himself. Mrs. Davison had a husband for whom she had never cared a rap, and who was really a wicked old man. She was justified too, so long as the affair did not come to a scandal.

And there was no reason it should. Shanghai is a place where people are so busy with their own concerns that they have very little time left for discussing their neighbours'. *That* is done by the Chinese servants, undoubtedly; and it might have been edifying to know what Mrs. Davison's *amah* and Mr. Kennedy's *coolie*, who were near relatives, said to each other as they received or forwarded the daily *chits* that passed between

their employers. It probably did not escape the all-noting, though apparently nought-seeing, eye of the gate-keeper at Mr. Davison's *hong* that these *chits* passed in a *chit-case*, from which the paper containing name of the receiver could easily be removed, and not in the tell-tale ordinary correspondence book, wherein letters to such a friend as Mrs. Denman were recorded. But what did it matter, what the Chinese thought or said, so long as the parties concerned knew it not?

Just at first Wilfrid and Violet were careful, and beyond the daily *chits*, confined themselves to chance meetings, and "accidental" coincidences in the matter of choosing the same afternoon to drop in at Mrs. Denman's house for tea. For Mrs. Denman had to be let into their confidence, if only to get her to hold her tongue. And Flossie had sighed, and had shaken her head wisely once or twice, and then had remembered her own two little fluffy-haired daughters, and how fond Mr. Kennedy was of children, and how Mrs. Kennedy hated them. What this remembrance had to do with the case in point it is impossible to explain, but it sufficed for Mrs. Denman.

But, as the weeks passed away, and the winter gradually grew to an end, *chits* and chance meetings were voted "not good enough." The days on which those chance meetings came off were good enough certainly; but those days on which the two did not meet were quite too bad. These were the days when Wilfrid discovered he must take a constitutional, as hard as he could, at a pace which was utterly impossible for Mrs. Kennedy, along some distant road. How was she to know this road was only a few yards off, on the Shanghai Race Course, and that the walk only meant a saunter with Violet on the far side of it, away from the main road? Or how was she to know that everybody in Shanghai knew it—everybody but herself and Mr. Davison?

That Wilfrid had deserted her, that he no longer went with

her to missionary meetings, that he went to a great many bachelor dinners, and came home very late from the office every day, were of course bitter facts soon forced upon her. And, devoted as she really was to her husband—with an unpleasant enough, selfish devotion it may be, but at any rate with a loyal devotion—, Mrs. Kennedy suffered untold pangs of hopeless jealousy. She was far too proud to complain of Wilfrid's conduct to herself, much less suffer any one else to blame him. When one of her special friends mentioned his name, Mrs. Kennedy would instantly freeze up with an awful frost. She knew, or rather fancied she knew, why she was no longer her husband's all-in-all. And this fancied knowledge was the bitterest drop in her cup. It was because she was childless.

And now, when it was quite too late, she began to try to please her husband. She would not go to balls formerly; she had made herself intensely disagreeable that memorable night at the theatre; now she went everywhere, a good deal to Wilfrid's annoyance. Of course she did not dance, but sat and glared in a corner, looking so stern and forbidding that even good-natured Mr. Denman, when ordered by his wife to take her in to supper, absolutely declined the task. Nor would she have had any supper at all on one particular occasion had not Tom Edwards taken compassion on her, just after Kennedy had finished his eleventh dance with Mrs. Davison.

Mrs. Kennedy had noted the number of dances; had noted the brilliance of youth of her rival; knew quite well, by instinct, how matters stood between these two. But she said not a word, only set her face like a flint, and waited for what time would bring.

As for Wilfrid, he was absolutely, unreasoningly happy. He was living in such a whirl of excitement that he had no time for remorse. They were worked very hard in the Shanghai Custom House; they went early and came away late. Every

spare moment he had was filled up with Violet—either seeing her, writing to her, reading *chits* from her, or planning their next meeting. Besides, one could be very gay in Shanghai. There were many clubs for all kinds of objects, and to most of these many Wilfrid belonged. He had given up the idea of saving, and was spending money recklessly though not viciously. In fact, his pace grew quite alarming to his best friends, and about a month or so after the Spring Races, to which Mrs. Kennedy could not bring herself to go, Mr. Denman was moved to speak quite seriously about Wilfrid to Flossie.

"Kennedy will be going to the dogs soon, if he doesn't take care," he said. "Can't you get Mrs. Davison to influence him a little? He really will be in serious trouble before long."

"Does he drink?" Flossie asked anxiously.

"No; at least not in the way young Edwards does. But still, I should fancy his head is not very strong. And he's acting like a fool too, in a way that's sure to get him into trouble. But he has the devil's own luck, all the same, little as he deserves it! Fancy, Flossie, last week a Chinaman came into the office selling Manila Lottery tickets. I took one for you, dear, but it was a blank, as usual! But Kennedy! He hummed and hawed over the concern, couldn't make up his mind, finally got the man to write down the numbers of two he fancied, and made him promise to bring them back in the afternoon, if he had them still. Actually, Kennedy couldn't decide which ticket he should take without 'having been home first,' as he put it. We all knew precious well it wasn't Mrs. Kennedy he was going to consult! All the youngsters were tittering, naturally. But here comes in his extraordinary luck. He came back after tiffin with the number settled, I presume. The Chinaman turned up again, and hadn't sold that identical ticket, the only one left. And to day we hear—what? Kennedy has won no less than twenty thousand dollars!! Did you ever hear the like? 'Don't tell my missus!' he said, and

off he went to Mrs. Davison's, in the middle of the day, not caring a jot for the passers-by. And this afternoon,—out in a high gig, driving Mrs. Davison! Foolish! mad! ridiculous!"

And Mr. Denman flung himself into a rocking-chair, and noisily clattered his heels together, to signify his vexation.

As for Mrs. Denman, her vexation at the imprudence of the afternoon's drive quite took away her satisfaction at the lucky lottery ticket. But what use was it to remonstrate with Violet, to tell her to make Wilfrid Kennedy more careful? She had done so over and over again, and what had been the result?

"I love him, Flossie, just as he is; and I don't want him altered in the least. He only goes in for all these excitements because he can't get me. So do I; and I can't blame him for what I do myself!"

But these were explanations Mrs. Denman was not at liberty to give her husband. And, as she was a trifle superstitious, she could not help looking on this fresh stroke of luck to Wilfrid as a sign that after all Providence was on the lovers' side.

PART III.

CHAPTER I.

"There is a bundle of despatches down from Peking this morning. Marching orders for some of us, I guess. I wonder who is to go? Scarcely you, Kennedy, you've only been here nine months. Wonder if I'm the unlucky mortal?"

Tom Edwards leaned over Kennedy's desk to impart the news. Wilfrid was late that morning, and had been obliged to enter himself accordingly. And now he had to make up for lost time, and he was due at Mrs. Denman's for tiffin, and here was that idiot Edwards gassing away to him!

"A move may mean a promotion, though," Edwards went on. "I shouldn't object to an extra twenty-five taels a month. I've not found my heiress yet, you see! Nor have I got some one to pick me out the winning number in the Manila Lottery!"

This was intended for a dig, and might have had the effect desired on Wilfrid had not the *ting-ch'ai* attached to the Commissioner's office made his appearance at that moment.

"Mr. Kennedy, Commissioner talky you come topside."

And Wilfrid got up at once and went, leaving Tom Edwards much disturbed in mind.

"Is Kennedy going to be moved?" he asked, appealing to the whole office. "He's a favourite at headquarters, I've more

than suspected for a long time. But it will be a beastly shame if he's jockeyed over our heads!"

"You had better not be in quite such a hurry about Kennedy's promotion," one of the Assistants remarked. "May be it is only intended for his good, to put him out of danger, this transfer you make so sure of. Perhaps Mrs. Kennedy's health demands a change!"

Then they all laughed, till the chief Assistant called for order, and pointed to five or six clerks belonging to different hongs, who had been waiting the officials' leisure for the last ten minutes.

Every one was busy when Wilfrid came back into the office, but every one found time to whisper the same question to him as he passed to his own place—

"Promotion?"

"No. Taiwan-fu."

Then he sat down to his work, and waited for them to come to condole with him.

He wanted their sympathy, anybody's sympathy, badly! The blow which he had known was bound to fall had fallen, but alas! how much too soon. It did not so much matter to him that Fate was decreeing his exile in distant Formosa, where everything would be against him—climate, want of society, all the *et ceteras* that made up the pleasantnesses of life in the outports on the mainland of China. Wilfrid had been in ports quite as unhealthy, quite as solitary, before. But those had been the days when he had never met Violet, when he was heart and hand free. To him at the present moment it seemed life must come to an end, that he must die a physical death, or become a raving maniac, if the hope of seeing Violet was taken from him. Surely the Fates allowed him little enough now—only a few short hours in the course of the week. He could not do with less, he could not do without her at all! To get up in the morning and wish

it were night; to lie dreaming of her by night, and long for the morning; without hope, in a port where mails were months old before you got them;—the situation was impossible!

And how glad Mrs. Kennedy would be to hear the news! Why, it was only the evening before that she had said she wanted to get away from Shanghai, that she might have the chance of seeing him, Wilfrid, "occasionally," in an outport! Had she been working for this end? Had she got this wish carried up to Peking? The Thomsons had gone up there lately, and Mrs. Thomson had been a good deal with Mrs. Kennedy, and had used her brougham freely. Was this the *quid pro quo*?

Wilfrid was not naturally of a suspicious nature; but his wife's words the previous evening had grated on his ear, and they came back uncomfortably now. He felt he could not tell her face to face of this disaster, and see her look of "thankful" triumph. He wrote the news on a slip of paper, and sent it to her by an office-coolie. She would have worn off her first joy by the time he saw her next.

It was otherwise with Violet. He must see her and tell her himself, lest the shock of hearing from an outsider might betray her. So he wrote her also a *chit*, bidding her wait for him in the Cemetery on her way to Mrs. Denman's tiffin.

And then to work, to try to shut out that horrible, blank future before him. An endless future, without one ray of hope in it! And he had been going to do such great things, if only he had been allowed to stay on in Shanghai. First, he had been going to pay off all his debts. Violet herself had undertaken to be his banker, and had taken possession, as a preliminary, of his just-won dollars. What was the use of being lucky now? What good would his money do him in Taiwan-fu? What use was it even to be alive there?

And then came back to him a few words, lightly spoken,

which had been amongst those offered to him for consolation by his fellow-Assistants that morning—

"If I had just won a big prize in the Manila Lottery, I would see the I.G. at Jericho before I would go to Formosa!"

Wilfrid got up, put on his hat, and walked straight out of the office, the minute the clock struck twelve. He had made up his mind to see the I.G. at Jericho.

CHAPTER II.

It was a heavy, still, and oppressive day, the one following that on which Wilfrid Kennedy received his orders for Taiwan-fu. Not a breath of air was stirring; even the "scissor-grinders," those insufferable cicadas, were mute. The mosquitoes, however, were in full swing, and in a vicious humour. For the "damp days" of the early Shanghai summer were drawing to a close, and the real heat was just about to begin.

Mr. Davison had had a restless night, and was feeling very unwell that morning. The hot weather did not suit him at all, and a breakfast was an impossibility. He got into his office about ten o'clock, and ordered a pick-me-up. For this would be a busy day for him. He was owner of one of the lines of steamers running between Shanghai and the coast ports, and to-day his finest and newest steamer, which had just made her maiden trip to the Far East, was to clear for Hongkong. Indeed, as Mr. Davison came into the office by one door the captain of the *Corea* entered by the other.

"Going out, Harvey?" Mr. Davison asked graciously. "Wish I were going with you! It would do me all the good in the world to get a blow. This place is positively stifling to-day!"

So it was. Great drops of perspiration were trickling down

Mr. Davison's neck, and standing on the unsteady hand that reached out for his glass.

"That was just what I came to ask you about, sir," the skipper answered. "The glass is going down steadily, and a typhoon is coming up, just as surely as God made little apples. By your leave and with your consent, Mr. Davison, I won't take the *Corea* out in such weather as this. I'll stay in till the blow is over. I'm an old hand on this coast, and I can tell pretty surely what's going to happen. And I'd rather not run the risk with a new ship, or indeed any ship at all. Put her off twenty-four hours, please, sir."

"Till the blow has begun, you had better say!" sneered Mr. Davison. "I just wish it *would* blow, and freshen us up a bit! You're always croaking about 'blows,' Harvey. Perpetually crying 'wolf!' I don't care if it does blow. I don't mean to have the *Corea* lying here eating her head off. Here are all your papers ready, cargo finished, everything done.—What do you mean by coming croaking here now, sir!"

Mr. Davison's temper was very short at the best of times, and this was not even a good time. And his worst manner was always reserved for his skippers, and more especially for Captain Harvey, who had a disagreeable habit of speaking out his own mind, as on this occasion.

His reply in the present instance was:—

"My opinion is, Mr. Davison, that it's not fit weather to take a ship out in, and that if we go we risk the lives of the crew."

"You are afraid of going, then?" Mr. Davison enquired sarcastically. "Come, come, you must have better reason for staying in port than a typhoon due next week. Why, there's the *Chanticleer*,—rotten, crazy old tub that she is,—*her* captain didn't think twice of taking her out this morning. She passed by a couple of hours and more ago. Won't the Hongkong men laugh when they hear we let ourselves be beaten by her!"

"The *Chanticleer* has gone out, do you mean to say? Well, her skipper must have taken leave of his seven senses! Gone out?—are you sure she's gone out?" Captain Harvey continued in a more doubtful tone. "I didn't see her, at any rate."

"No, you were probably asleep," Mr. Davison said drily. "But you can take my word for it; and that she'll be in Hongkong twenty-four hours before you, though you go twelve knots, and she can only make nine!"

And he turned his back on the strong-minded skipper, and sat down at his desk as though Harvey were already gone.

But the old sea-dog did not go. Mr. Davison had touched him just between the joints of his harness, in that tender place where he could be hurt. There was one thing Joseph Harvey could not bear, and that was being beaten, even by one admittedly his inferior. A storm was coming sure enough; of that he was positive, and the time of year warned him that it might be a dangerous one. There were no weather signals or storm reports in China in those days, but a man of his experience did not need them. He had come with the intention of refusing to take his ship out; he would willingly have paid out of his own pocket any expenses that might be incurred by the delay; but all his convictions were shaken by that wretched *Chanticleer*, sailing to crow over him in Hongkong.

"Mr. Davison."

A good five minutes had elapsed since the *taipan* had subsided into his chair and correspondence. Mr. Davison was perfectly aware that Captain Harvey was still in the room, and had a pretty shrewd guess at what was passing in the skipper's mind. But he snarled out:—

"What, are you there still? Why don't you get aboard and to sleep before the storm comes?"

"No joking, please," the captain answered angrily. "I've made up my mind to go out, and I'll do so in another hour. But,

Mr. Davison, I wish you to remember that I've given it as my opinion that we are running a great risk."

"Oh, you've changed your mind, have you?" Mr. Davison answered lightly. "I'll take the responsibility, and the *kudos* too if you like, so long as you get into Hongkong before the *Chanticleer*!"

* * * * * * *

"Harvey's an old croaker," Mr. Davison said to his chief cashier, who came into the room not long after the skipper had left it. "He funks going out when there's a puff of wind; he funks going out when there isn't. I have a fight with him every time. Made me quite hot just now! And I'm sure one doesn't need to be *made* hot on such a day as this. Don't let any one disturb me this morning, Brown. I'm very busy."

"Very sorry, Mr. Davison, but there's a lady here, a Mrs. Kennedy, who says she must see you directly."

"Mrs. Kennedy? Who is Mrs. Kennedy? I can't see any one. Tell her so, Brown, and give her five dollars if she wants them."

"She's a lady, sir. Her husband is Assistant in the Customs. I think you had better see her."

It was lucky Mr. Davison was not looking up, and so did not see the peculiar smile that played round Mr. Brown's carefully cultivated moustache.

"Shew her in then, Brown. Boy, take away this glass."

Mr. Davison got up, smoothed his few remaining locks before a glass, and drew forward an armchair for his visitor. Mrs. Kennedy, Mrs. Kennedy,—he seemed to remember the name. Where had he heard it, where had he seen it? Oh yes, in a *chit*-book lately, Mrs. Davison's *chit*-book, brought by mistake to him. Still, it was strange that Mrs. Kennedy should come to see him instead of his wife. Probably she had come in at the wrong door, and that fool Brown——

Mrs. Kennedy was standing before him now. A plain, not too young lady, in a drab cotton gown and a large garden hat, tied under the chin with ribbons.

"Mr. Davison," she said; and at the sound of her voice the mighty *taipan* gave a start. It was so hollow, and seemed to come from her boots. "Read this!"

And she handed him a sheet of paper.

Mr. Davison could not read without glasses, and it took him some time to find them. When he had done so, he read the paper, which ran as follows:—

"*My dear Louisa,*

I find it will be impossible for me to go to Taiwan-fu with you. I have deceived you for a long time, but I will deceive you no longer. I am going away, where you will never find me nor hear of me again. I beg of you to go back to Bath, and forget you have ever known me. Would to God for your sake you never had! [There was a big blot here, as if some words had been written and scratched out.]

W. K."

Mr. Davison read the letter, folded it up carefully, and returned it to the owner.

"Well?" that lady asked anxiously.

"Do you want any opinion on that letter?" Mr. Davison enquired in a puzzled manner. "If so, you had better consult a lawyer. For myself, I scarcely understand why you have shewn it to me. I neither know who the writer is, nor to whom it is addressed, nor what it means. Have you not mistaken the house, my dear madam?"

And he turned to the bell, and laid hold of the rope. The woman must clearly be either mad or drunk.

"Mistaken? I only wish I had mistaken the house! I hoped I was altogether mistaken, till I went to your private house, and found that your wife had eloped with my husband!"

Mr. Davison's hand fell from the bell-rope; his jaw fell, his face turned livid. It was a dangerous moment for a stout man on such a sultry day. He staggered to the chair he had placed ready for his visitor, and sat down on it, perfectly unable to speak for a moment.

Mrs. Kennedy looked round the room. The door into the outer office was standing ajar, and indiscreet ears might be within hearing. She closed the door and locked it.

"Mr. Davison," she said, lowering her voice to an awesome whisper, "this business has been going on for a long time. I have known of it for many months. But I never thought it would come to this!"

And here Mrs. Kennedy, actually for the first time in her married life, broke down, and covered her face with her hands.

That moment's pause gave Mr. Davison time to recover. He sat up straight and addressed her in his own peculiar style.

"You are labouring under a delusion, Mrs.——ahem! Mrs. Davison cannot have anything to do with this very lamentable business. She is in her own apartment, as I can easily prove to you."

And he rose again to ring the bell.

"It is of no use your ringing," Mrs. Kennedy cried, hastily drying her eyes. "The servants can't tell you anything, or they won't. But Mrs. Davison is not in her room. I've just come from there. Ask your *boy* if she hasn't gone out!"

But this Mr. Davison would not do, naturally. He walked out of the office, upstairs, and into Violet's boudoir himself.

No, she was not there. Her *amah* was, however, and busily engaged in tidying (and ransacking) a drawer filled with handkerchiefs—an article against which no Chinaman or Chinawoman is proof.

Missisy have go outside. What time go? No savvey. Little time come back? No savvey; no have talkey. Missisy

one piecey man go? No savvey. Go carriage? No savvey. "No savvey" was the only answer Mr. Davison, now slightly disquieted, got from the *amah*.

The *boy* was nearly equally discreet. The only information Mr. Davison gathered from him was that Mrs. Davison had gone out very early, before seven o'clock, and had got into a *jin-ricksha* just outside the gate.

This in itself was a strange circumstance, and increased Mr. Davison's discomfort and displeasure. It was a most undignified thing for his wife to have done. Indeed, he felt exceedingly uncomfortable by the time he again faced Mrs. Kennedy, who was standing bolt upright just where he had left her.

"Mrs. Davison is not at home," he said stiffly. "But I have no doubt she will come in shortly. Will you call again?"

He settled himself once more at his desk, with as unconcerned an air as he could assume. Mrs. Kennedy hesitated a moment. Then she said, having first closed the door, which Mr. Davison had again left open:—

"I don't think you quite understand me, Mr. Davison. I have the most positive proof, furnished by one who saw them on board, that my husband and your wife have gone off on the *Chanticleer* this morning. What do you propose to do?"

Mrs. Kennedy had been born to command, and she had commanded all her life. Mr. Davison felt and recognised her power now. It was in a voice his inferiors did not know that he answered:—

"I do not know. I am too confused to know. Are you sure that you are right?"

It was pitiable to see him now, so fallen from his own self-estimation. They were truly partners in misfortune, and Mrs. Kennedy's fellow-feeling actually made her kindly towards this "evil liver." Her voice was comparatively soft as she said:—

"I have made up my mind what I shall do, Mr. Davison, and I think you had better do the same. I could not bear to be pitied by the people here, nor to receive their sympathy. I want nothing from anybody. But I shall insist on my rights. My husband cannot, and shall not, desert me like this. I have legal claims upon him. I am going to follow him at once and bring him back. You had better do the same."

"Do the same, madam? It is quite impossible for me, quite impossible, granting even that your story is correct, which——"

"Very well then, stay and have the finger of scorn pointed at you. *I* will not, at any rate. I am going to Hongkong to-day, if I can find a steamer going. I will not sit quiet and be wronged. But I will beg of you, Mr. Davison, not to repeat any of our conversation. I hope no one in Shanghai will know of this business till it is all over. Good-bye."

And Mrs. Kennedy stalked out of the office, carefully leaving the door open.

Mr. Davison lay back in his chair, and mopped his forehead. Through the half-open door sounds of suppressed tittering came to his ears. The young men were making merry over his strange visitor. Was it possible they would make merry over him too, over the old fool who couldn't take care of his young wife? Why hadn't he looked after her better? How was it he had neglected her doings so entirely? Of course she didn't care for him, he had always known that; but that had never seemed a matter of importance to him. He had married her in the way of business, and the marriage had not brought any credit on the *hong*. His wife had been a bad investment, in short. But how would this matter strike the Shanghai world to-day? His friends, how would they receive the news? How they would suddenly stop their whispering when he came into the Club that evening! How his intimate old cronies would venture on a word of sympathy! Sympathy with *him*! No, that was intolerable; and this woman,

this Mrs. Kennedy, was right in running away from it. He would do so also; and though he might never take Violet back, at any rate none of his old acquaintances should have the chance of sneering at him. After all, it might all be a lie, but if it were not he was too old to be fooled by a girl now!

And so it came to pass that just as the *Corea*, with Mrs. Kennedy on board, was about to cast off from the wharf, Mr. Davison's brougham hastily drove up, and the *taipan* himself stepped on the deck, and told the skipper he too was going to Hongkong.

CHAPTER III.

The *Chanticleer* was well outside the river by evening. For the last time in her life, so Violet hoped, she had looked on those Woosung forts. It was stiflingly hot still, but the captain promised a blow beyond Gutzlaff, at the mouth of the Yangtsze. And there on the deck Wilfrid and Violet had sat, and had watched the land gradually disappear,—that ugly brown muddy shore where Violet had suffered so much. The *Chanticleer* was not a fast boat; she was scarcely a passenger-boat at all, and it took a long time to get down to Gutzlaff. But even that was passed now, and they were really outside, beyond the dirty yellow water at the mouth of the Yangtsze, with their faces turned to Hongkong.

How utterly delightful it was, in spite of the ill-kept ship, the stuffy cabins, and the ricketty deck-chairs! There the two sat, and planned out their new life, calculated their resources, went over their perils, and ended each gloomy suggestion by a grasp of each other's hand and a look in each other's eyes. They were in no hurry to kiss each other now; they would have all their lifetime to kiss in. Indeed, they scarcely felt themselves lovers any more; they were simply husband and wife. The past was altogether a dead past, but a past too present for them to realise any remorse for it as yet.

But all the time, as they sailed on and on, though they knew it not, the pursuers came after them and gained on them.

Violet was tired and went early to bed. The evening was, if possible, still more sultry than the morning, and the night was worse than the evening. Wilfrid could not sleep. A mosquito had got into his cabin and kept singing just above his ear. When he closed his eyes, a sort of spectre seemed to stalk in, with his wife's hat, his mother's eyes, and Violet's features. He tried to smoke, but it was of no use. The matches were damp, and when at last he lighted his cigarette, it burnt down on one side, and only stained his fingers. He got up and went out on deck.

It was early yet, for the bells had only just gone half-past eleven. Very still too was the air, for he fancied he could hear the bells of another vessel, which was apparently overhauling them,—a vessel whose lights his long-sighted eyes could scarcely make out. Wilfrid walked along the deck, and began to climb up on to the bridge to catch a better sight of her.

And then a strange thing happened. The night, as has just been said, had been still with a stillness perfectly oppressive. But as Wilfrid laid his hand on the railing of the ladder that led up to the bridge, there came, as it seemed round an island straight ahead—a sharp pointed rock whereon never foot had trod—a sudden cold gust of wind. It came so suddenly and so sharply that it nearly lifted Wilfrid off his feet. And it swept along the deck, and carried across to the bulwarks those two deck chairs on which Violet and he had sat. Then the gust passed further along, towards that other distant vessel.

Jamming his cap on his head, Wilfrid climbed on to the bridge. The captain was pacing it alone and did not notice him. Kennedy stood still and looked around.

Truly the night was ghostly, awesome, up here! The moon, which had been trying to shine through a film as of heat when Wilfrid went to bed, had now gone in behind a thick bank of

cloud, and a heavy pall seemed to hang from the sky and lose itself in the ocean behind them. Just ahead loomed the black rock, and a little to their left, like phantom ships, the great masts of two Foochow pole-junks straggled up into the air. And in the far distance, from that dark south towards which they were steering, came a muttering sound as of distant thunder. Wilfrid looked behind for the lights of the other steamer. They had disappeared in the haze.

"A storm is coming up," Wilfrid thought, "and quickly too." Even as he thought there came another gust, chiller than the last, not from round the island, but across from the coast. Sheer across them it came, and the boats on the starboard side gave an ominous creak. And at this gust the skipper turned sharply round and disappeared into the chartroom.

As the captain went into the chartroom the chief officer's head appeared upon the ladder.

"You up, Mr. Kennedy? I should think you'd better get below. It's going to blow."

It had began to do so already. The weather had changed rapidly within the last ten minutes. The puffs of wind were coming faster and faster, and the sky had grown black all over. No sign now even of the great rock they were just then passing; and the junk masts were rocking and swaying to and fro. Rocking and groaning too, as only Chinese masts can groan. And the sound of men hauling down a sail came to the ears of the two on the bridge as though through cotton wool.

"How's the glass, skipper?"

"Falling, sir, falling steadily. It's going to be a dirty night."

"Look there!" the chief officer suddenly said, pointing in the direction of the nearest junk.

Through the growing, oppressive darkness Wilfrid peered down towards the water. From the junk's side there was floating

away, floating towards them, a little white paper junk, the very copy of the great ship itself.

"The Chinese think a typhoon is coming. They always send out a boat like that in typhoon weather. That's for Joss to sink instead of themselves!"

The officer laughed, and passed into the chartroom. But Wilfrid felt a shiver of something like fear creep up his back. If the officer had outgrown superstition, Wilfrid Kennedy had not.

But he had no time left for fear. The sea, now that they were beyond the shelter of the island, was no longer the oily mill-pond it had been. Great and angry waves were rising, and the wind was rising too. Nearer and nearer the great storm swept, faster and faster it came on them. Now it was as though great guns were cannonading somewhere close at hand, now as though the sound of sharp volleys of artillery came borne towards them. And then the *Chanticleer* began to rock, the boats on the davits creaked, and faintly, very faintly, through the fast gathering storm came the sound of eight bells from the deck below.

"Go below, Mr. Kennedy, and stay there. We are going to batten down everything," came the orders from the captain.

"Wilfrid, where are you?"

Violet, nearly blown away, was clinging to the lowest step of the bridge as he came down.

"Darling, why did you not stay in your cabin? It is not safe for you out here."

Scarcely safe for him either, as matters then stood. For at that moment a great wave broke over the deck, and carried over the bulwarks, a very little way from them, the two deck chairs. Then the *Chanticleer* righted herself and plunged forward into the black night.

"Oh Wilfrid, what *is* happening? We are running down a junk!"

Close by them, right ahead, sounded an awful, terror-

carrying shriek. Heedless of the danger, Wilfrid and Violet staggered towards the bulwarks. And there, bearing down on them, filled with men and women shrieking for their lives, they saw a large fishing boat. Right on their bows she came, and death for all her crew seemed inevitable, when——she suddenly turned at a sharp angle, "kept away," and grazed past them at half-a-yard's length.

Just above their heads they could hear the skipper hurling anathemas on these reckless fishermen, and then the *Chanticleer's* whistle sounded for an instant. There was an instant's lull; the next moment came a crash, as the wind caught one of the boats on the port side, and lifted her clean off the davits.

"Look out for yourself, Mr. Kennedy! Excuse me, Mrs. Davison!"

The skipper had gripped Violet's arm, only just in time to prevent her from falling. The *Chanticleer* was rolling and pitching, and wave after wave came splashing over the low bulwarks. In a moment Violet felt herself lifted off her feet and carried in two strong arms, not Wilfrid's, into a place of safety, into the captain's own cabin, which adjoined the deck-house.

"You can stay here if you like," he said. "You'll find it less stuffy than down below, and I can look after you better. Would you like Mr. Kennedy to come?"

He was a kind-hearted old salt, with a very weak spot for a pretty face. And one of his officers had just been telling him why these two passengers were on board,—that is, the "why" as commonly reported in Shanghai. And that "why" it was which had brought him off the bridge, and made him offer his cabin, and, when he went back to the chartroom, give special instructions to the third officer to get Mrs. Davison anything she might happen to want.

"The blow will be over soon," the skipper told Violet cheerfully. "Looks like the tail-end of a typhoon, did you say

Mr. Kennedy? Oh no! nothing so bad as that! Only, as you see, Mrs. Davison, we always take precautions!"

And then he shut the cabin door, bidding Wilfrid lock it, "in case the water should get in"——and that was the last they saw of him.

Inside, out of the chilly storm air, the cabin seemed stuffy, almost stifling. The little oil lamp smelt far more than it enlightened, and swayed to and fro with the rolling, pitching vessel. Outside the window all was black darkness, save when every now and then a lantern flickered past them as one of the crew, slipping and sliding about, passed to some duty. No officer came near them. Nothing reached them from beyond the cabin but the mighty splashing of the waves, as they broke again and again over the deck, while the wind howled and roared on every side, whistled shrill through the rigging, boomed from the bridge, moaned from the land, and rushed away, shrieking, over the great ocean to some distant land.

Crash! crash! they could hear the crockery smashing in the pantry and saloon just below them. The cargo was shifting too; there was the dull thud of heavy bales knocking against each other. Splash, came the water against the cabin window, splash, splash, again and again. Only the very strongest of glasses could have stood the shock. The lamp, which had begun to sputter, suddenly gave out, and died away into a sickening stench. Then it went out altogether, and Wilfrid and Violet were left alone in the darkness. But still the *Chanticleer* kept on her way, and once, when there came an instant's lull in the howling storm, they fancied they heard the captain's voice shouting orders from the bridge.

But that was the last lull. The bells had stopped chiming; time had come to an end for that night on the *Chanticleer*. Rattle, rattle went the screw, the waves knocked louder than ever for admission, and Wilfrid and Violet, no longer able to

sit on the little seat near the door, crouched down together on the floor, holding tight to each other.

Now the pumps were at work; they could distinguish the sound of them through the din. The engines were going too, for the *Chanticleer* was still holding her own. The night was wearing away, or soon should be. For one instant a grey streak flitted across the sky, and then came a new sound from a new quarter. Rain. Right over them it swept, a furious driving scud, and lashed their roof like a shower of bullets.

"The storm will be over soon, darling. See, the rain has come!"

But even as Wilfrid spoke, the wind gave a fresh howl, and suddenly struck the *Chanticleer* full on the port side. For an instant there sounded the rattle of the screw, and then there ran a mighty shiver through the vessel, followed by a long sharp crack. A terrific roar went up from a group of sailors who must have been crouching close by. There was a general rush backwards, and Wilfrid, peering out through the window, saw a frightful black iron monster dashing from right to left on the deck, scattering destruction with every swoop.

"Violet, you heard that noise. It was the steering-gear which broke. We're done for now; the ship is unmanageable. Oh, why did I bring you to die like this! Violet, darling, forgive me, tell me you do!"

Wilfrid's arm was round her; his eyes tried in vain to see her through the awful darkness. Was she going to faint, or to shrink away from him now? There was one moment's agonising pause, and then Violet had whispered in his ear:—

"Death with you is easy, Wilfrid. Only hold me tight all the time. Promise you won't let me go!"

* * * * * * *

The *Chanticleer* staggered, rolled, and slowly, slowly began to move round, carried by the wind. And all the time that awful

banging and swaying went on quite near to them, while the waves swirled and sucked round the ship, dragging her, like wild beasts, right into the trough of the sea, where they could devour her at leisure.

"Did you hear that Wilfrid? It was a whistle, quite close. We shall be saved!"

Yes, it was a whistle; but one which the poor disabled *Chanticleer* had no time to answer. Looking out of the cabin window it was all black darkness for a minute, and then suddenly a great red Eye flamed in upon them. Something black towered above the *Chanticleer*, a mass loomed through the driving pall of rain. There was a mighty shock, a shock that burst open the cabin door, the noise of crashing timber, the sound of many voices mad with fear, a flare as of fire, and as a pitiless, unreasoning accompaniment, the eternal beat of the waves, the pelt of the rain. All this can only have lasted a moment, but that moment held in it a lifetime of agony. For Wilfrid and Violet distinctly saw, on the deck, not twenty paces from their battered refuge, her whom they both had wronged—Wilfrid's wife. How she came there, where she could have been standing when the *Corea* and the *Chanticleer* crashed together, they were never to know. Only she was there, even in death to come between them.

Had they time to realise all this, or was death too near for them to feel any of the anguish that life would have had in keeping for them? None can tell. For swift following upon that vision came a great and shining wave, and when it had passed the *Corea* and the *Chanticleer* had both disappeared into that great locker of which no man holds the key.

But to this day no man knows their grave, for not one fragment of the *Corea* nor of the *Chanticleer* has ever been washed ashore. They both went out from port, and disappeared, in that memorable typhoon. Men talked of them, and wondered, and

then forgot. The coast almanacks alone keep their memory green.

Nor will Mrs. Denman ever know whether Violet and Wilfrid repented of their deed, nor even if Mr. Davison and Mrs. Kennedy had found them. But this one thing she is sure of in her inmost heart, though she is but a "giggling goose," that if they two, Wilfrid and Violet, could only arise from the dead and tell her what they feel, it would be that they are satisfied.

No. 4.

PLAYING PROVIDENCE

A CHINA COAST TALE

BY

LISE BOEHM.

. . . . . *"Not my pain,*
My pain was nothing: oh your poor poor love,
Your broken love!"

PLAYING PROVIDENCE.

CHAPTER I.

This is how Mr. Smith, clerk in the Customs at Kelung, some thirty miles from the Customs' headquarters at Hôbé, North Formosa, came to be in Hôbé for the space of some six weeks; and how the Commissioner's wife, Mrs. Bridget Delane, came to be mixed up in the story of his life, with the results to be set forth hereafter.

For three whole months, ever since Mrs. Delane, in the person of her husband, newly appointed Commissioner of Customs, had taken over charge of the port, there had been one thorn in her side, one pebble in her shoe, one crease in the smooth page of her life. She had, as was her wont, found out, sought out, wormed out, ordered out, every little private detail, every aspect of family or of bachelor life; each dead, or alive and secretly-cherished, love-story. In short, she knew every single circumstance, trivial or important, about every single mortal in Hôbé, Twatutia, and Kelung, the three settlements which, up to the time when Formosa was ceded to Japan, made up the Treaty Port of Tamsui. True or false, wrung out or volunteered, the secrets of every individual, the skeletons in the cupboards, the family jars, the temporary estrangements,—none of these had escaped her. Only in one case had she been baffled, and that was concerning this same man Smith.

And now her enemy was delivered into her hand, delivered by the merest fluke, by a veritable dispensation of Providence! For he had gone down with an unaccountably violent attack of malarial fever, away in distant Kelung, just when the only doctor's services were required in the other two settlements. At the beginning of summer this was, when the freshly turned-up earth reeks of malaria, and the death-rate per diem among the Chinese soldiery is steadily mounting up to its maximum. So Dr. Eugen Gregorius, not being able to be in two places at one and the same time, had requisitioned the Customs' rapid-boat, and had brought his patient with him back to Hôbé.

Who indeed was this Smith? Mrs. Bridget had before this vainly enquired of every available person, from her husband down to her chair-coolie. No one knew, or at any rate every one professed not to know. Dr. Gregorius, who united to his professional knowledge a vast amount of information about every one else, which information he was always perfectly ready to impart, solemnly swore he had never heard Mr. Smith give a clue as to what he was, had been, had come from, or where he expected to go to. Smith—C. was his initial—had come over to Formosa in the days of the late Commissioner, with his appointment as clerk in the Customs in a carpet bag, which literally contained nothing besides but a sponge and a toothbrush. He had asked to be sent to Kelung, or rather his appointment contained a clause stationing him there. He had not registered as a British subject, though they were all of them, Gregorius himself included, certain that he was an Englishman, by reason of the aforesaid toothbrush. But then the Consul always laughed at registration, and was lax, terribly lax! Would the Imperial German Vice-Consul in Amoy were a quarter as lax! This British Consul actually allowed Mr. Smith to do as he liked! Invited him certainly to dinner once, but only laughed when a curt refusal was sent back. And so——

But here Mrs. Delane's anger had got the better of her, and she had broken in, vowing that this state of affairs should not last, and that she herself would investigate what was probably a most shocking scandal.

Yet three months had passed since that day, and the Commissioner's wife was no "forrarder!" True, she had carefully examined the mail-bags, but no letter had she found addressed to Mr. Smith. Nor had the Consulate letter-coolie, who, with a New Year dollar in view, brought all his packages of correspondence for her to inspect, ever got a letter for or from Kelung. Mrs. Delane actually began to grow thin under the mental torment which this mystery gave her. She ceased to take any interest in the squabbles of the servants at the Junior Customs' Mess, and forgot to insist that the unfortunate infants of the tidewaiters should take special concoctions, or wear extraordinary garments manufactured by herself. Her hair began to fall out; her appetite to fail; her unfortunate spouse to be deprived of his night's rest. And all because of Mr. Smith of Kelung.

"May I come and see him?" she asked eagerly, when Dr. Gregorius, as was his fashion, came in with the tea-things to report affairs in general.

The doctor's round face grew long, and he looked blankly uncomfortable.

"Oh no, my dear Mrs. Delane, by no means. Why, he is very ill, and the excitement caused by the presence of any stranger might prove fatal to him. In a few days, in a few days," he added consolingly.

But Mrs. Bridget scouted the compromise.

"I have been trained as a hospital nurse, Dr. Gregorius, so I am just the person who ought to go," she snapped out. "You are trying to keep me away from him; but you are wrong. A woman always makes the best nurse, so I am going!"

"No, no, you must not go," cried the unfortunate doctor.

Mrs. Delane at a patient's bedside meant an alarming rise in temperature in any case, and in this particular case might mean something far more serious. "You must not go; the fever is infectious!"

Now this was a lie, and Gregorius knew it. But lies are justifiable where doctors are concerned, and this one, boldly spoken, was a telling lie. Mrs. Delane was an abject coward as regarded infection.

"Then I must wait," she said in a tone of vexation. "There, Dr. Gregorius, take your tea. You had better not sit too near me if there is an infectious disease in your house. Why, indeed, do you have him in your house? Why don't you put him into the Mission hospital? If he is so ill, he won't mind, or know, that he is amongst Chinamen. Shall I send my chair-coolies down to move him now? No? I think you are very wrong doctor, to keep him and risk all our lives!"

And for that one sorry lie Dr. Gregorius was obliged to listen for half-an-hour to an exhortation on the duty and manner of disinfecting, was obliged to refuse half-a-dozen remedies for himself and his patient, and had to parry some half hundred skilfully introduced hints as to information concerning Mr. Smith which might have fallen from the sick man in his delirium. For Mrs. Delane was a firm believer in the possibility of surprising secrets out of a delirious person.

"I truly have to work hard for my dinner," said Eugen Gregorius to himself as he went down to his own house that evening. "And after all, the dinner was not worth the eating. And the wine was corked, execrably corked!"

CHAPTER II.

Fifteen years of Formosa, and some twenty-five of China, had rotted away many of the good qualities with which Eugen Gregorius had started in life. The general demoralisation of the foreigners around him, caused in part by a deadly climate, in part by want of occupation, in part by too much ready money easily available, had slowly but surely affected even the sturdy Teuton. By dint of much fever he had almost become fever-proof; by dint of hard drinking—not excessive but steady imbibing—he had become callous to suffering in himself or in others; by dint of losing his friends, or by being forgotten of them, he had become hard-hearted, with no pleasures in life but mere animal pleasures,—good food, and a good bed, and with no horizon beyond the very day he was then living.

It had not been altogether Formosa that had made him thus. There was a certain false-hearted *Luischen*, whose photograph had long since faded into a few yellow streaks, who had in the first place been responsible for the damage done,—a Luischen who was now a stout, double-chinned *Frau*, the mother of fourteen, and of twins innumerable! But Gregorius had never known her as Frau; she was to him still the "gnädiges Fräulein" of his beer and long pipe days,—days gone and quite forgotten now, or

only remembered lately, when the coarsely inquisitive hand of Mrs. Delane had sought to unlock his most innermost chamber.

At any rate, sentiment or not (for sentiment dies hard in a Teutonic breast), Dr. Gregorius was determined that Mrs. Delane should leave Smith alone until he was strong enough to fight for himself. But Fate is stronger than determination! Even as the doctor was taking his morning cocktail, just before going in to see his patient, the boy brought him a chit from Twatutia, the tea-settlement twelve miles up the Tamsui river. Fever and sunstroke up there; Gregorius wanted at once. The matter brooked no delay, so after having looked in on Smith, who was tossing about in his sleep, muttering under his breath, and after having ordered Smith's boy on no account to let any one in, and to give certain medicines at certain times, the doctor set off in a native boat, against the tide and against his will, for Twatutia and his fresh patient.

And the hot hours dragged slowly by, and Smith still tossed and moaned. The boy, replete with rice and pickled cabbage, had subsided into a heavy sleep. The sun rose higher and higher, and outside gradually the noisy natives grew quiet. Every one was resting. Even on board the great junks at anchor the sailors had ceased chattering and were lying, drowsy, under the shelter of the piled-up sails. No sound but the splash of oars coming nearer and nearer the little jetty; then the sound of the boathook scraping along the great stones to find a holding-place, and the spell of sleep was broken.

A stout female figure, with a sunhat calculated by its frightfulness and dimensions to strike terror into the hearts of the beholders, toiled slowly along the uneven, baking flags of the jetty, up to the doctor's house. The figure was followed by a diminutive Chinese boy, the grin of a demon widening his already flattened-out nose, who was bearing a basket containing many parcels, each of the ominous empty-jam-tin shape.

It was Mrs. Bridget and her "familiar spirit," her spy in plain language, who had come to look after Dr. Gregorius' patient in Dr. Gregorius' absence.

And a good reason, to her thinking, had she in coming. For, by one of those strange coincidences which often happen in real life, a courier had arrived that very morning from Kelung with a mail from a Spanish vessel that had put into port from Japan. And with the mail had come, and now actually stared her in the face, a letter addressed in a shaky, childish hand to

Cyril Smith, Esq.,
Kelung,
North Formosa.

To say that Mrs. Delane had turned over, held up to the light, smelt, tried a loose corner, and thoroughly examined the envelope a dozen times, would not be exaggerating. The letter burned in her presence like fire. She could think of nothing else. "Cyril"—then he must be a gentleman. (All Mrs. Delane's hypotheses she invariably assumed at once to be facts: things were, because she thought they might be.) A child's hand—what child? Why a child? Was it a disguised hand? "Hakodate" was the postmark. Did she know anybody in Hakodate? No, not exactly; but the cousin of one of the tidewaiters in Amoy was constable at the British Consulate there. He would know if there were any Smiths in the place. But supposing Smith was an assumed name, how then?

"Doctor have go Twatutia," announced the familiar spirit, who had been stationed on the verandah with a spyglass.

"Have go?" asked Mrs. Delane eagerly. "How fashion you savvey?"

"Doctor-coolie just now have talkey my. Missisy can see boat; just now come Kantow." And the spyglass was handed to Mrs. Delane.

There, sure enough, under the bold cliff called Kantow, halfway to Twatutia, a tiny speck was to be seen creeping on.

"Boy, catchey boat, catchey coolie come. My go doctor house. Chop-chop!"

And bearing the enigma-solving letter, Mrs. Delane had gone.

It was easy enough to get into the sick man's room. The door stood wide open, and though the boy in charge awoke with a start when the Commissioner's wife appeared in the verandah, he did not attempt to oppose her way. The small boy set down the basket inside the bamboo blinds, and betook himself to the house of a neighbouring friend, there to gamble with dominoes for a few *cash* until his mistress should reappear. And Mrs. Bridget, left in possession, and holding tightly the letter in her hands, walked firmly up to the sick man's bed, and opened the mosquito-curtain.

At the noise of the heavy step, Cyril Smith had half come to his senses, and when Mrs. Delane looked down on him he was lying on his back, staring with feverishly bright and anxiously shifting eyes at the inquisitive but kindly face and the portentous sunhat bending over him.

"I am the Commissioner," said Mrs. Bridget in a loud, distinct voice. This was true, the so-called Commissioner being only her shadow. "I have brought you a letter. Would you like me to read it to you?"

The sick man was all alive and alert in an instant. A sudden rush of blood to his head coloured his eyeballs; he opened his parched lips, and a stammering sound, ending in a groan, more than half alarmed Mrs. Delane. Pity, compassion, a faint far-off idea of what was struggling for utterance, almost tempted her to stay her hand. She laid the letter down on the table, and turned to the basket for one of the mysterious tins. It was jammed, and just as she managed to disengage it she heard a flop and a bang close behind her.

Cyril Smith lay as he had fallen on the floor, face downwards. But in his right hand he grasped tightly, so tightly that with difficulty she managed to take it from him—when with the help of the boy she had got him back into bed—the letter, now with the envelope half wrenched from it, and which had nearly cost the Customs' clerk his life.

Somehow or other that same letter slipped into Mrs. Delane's pocket when she was driven forth by the alarm of the approach of the doctor's boat. And as it had lost its envelope by the time she was halfway home, perhaps it is not astonishing that Bridget Delane knew what was in Cyril Smith's letter by bedtime, and, what is more, had persuaded herself that she had done the right thing and her duty in reading the aforesaid letter.

CHAPTER III.

But this self-complacency was not fated to last long.

What, indeed, is the use of knowing a secret if no one knows that you know it? What is the pleasure of possessing knowledge if you cannot impart it to the ignorant? A piece of knowledge such as this, too, which absolutely must be made use of at once since, as Dr. Gregorius said, Mr. Smith of Kelung was dying, and had been dying, slowly but certainly, ever since that fatal day when he had been called away to Twatutia?

Did Dr. Gregorius know of that visit paid in his absence? Had he, hearing of what had happened from the boy in charge, put two and two together, and fixed the calamitous four on Mrs. Delane's guilty head? If he did know, if he had guessed, or if he had been told, Dr. Gregorius at least never faced Mrs. Delane, nor accused her roundly of being next door to her brother's murderer. For why? A living dog is more to be feared than a dead lion; and though Dr. Gregorius honestly tried his best to keep the lion alive, he did so without any hope of succeeding. And afterwards, when the lion should be dead, the living dog might prove a most unpleasant enemy. For which cowardly sentiments not the doctor, but the Formosan climate, must have been clearly responsible.

But after two days, during which Dr. Gregorius had uniformly treated Mrs. Delane to the most alarming bulletins, the good lady began to fancy that she smelt a rat. Mr. Smith took so long to die that she began to think he might possibly after all be going to survive. At all events, she had leisure now to think over her secret, and to determine how to make use of it. She was bursting with the mystery: but to what purpose? Mr. Delane was away from home, away in Kelung, madly collecting information for a report on coal-mines and gold-washing. And even if he had been in Hôbé, his wife would have hesitated to tell him. The transaction was, well, a trifle too "high-handed" for the little Commissioner's nerves. There was not a single woman in the place whom she trusted sufficiently to take into her confidence. The two or three tidewaiters' wives were "too great gossips,"—Mrs. Delane, of course, never ranked herself in the same category. There remained only one man whose advice she wished to take, that is, one man whom she really wanted to tell, and that was Dr. Gregorius.

Still, how awkward it would be to begin her story! Awkward or not, however, it must be done; and, after all, the telling might not be so hard as in anticipation.

And so it proved. The doctor himself led up to the difficult subject that very evening after dinner, when they were sitting out in the verandah, Mrs. Delane with her legs safely tied up in cotton pillow-cases against the mosquitoes, the doctor smoking one of Mr. Delane's choicest Manilas.

"I wish I knew whether Smith has any relations," Gregorius puffed forth, as though thinking aloud. "It is to me repugnant that he should die like a rat in a hole, and his friends never hear what has become of him. Who knows? he may have a wife, a child, waiting for him; for surely he has not been saving his money so carefully for nothing."

Mrs. Bridget stole a look at the doctor's face. How much

did he know after all? Or was he merely pumping her? She held her breath in tight, and Eugen Gregorius resumed, after a somewhat lengthy pause:

"There has been found, near my jetty, an envelope bearing his name. But no letter inside. Now, how could he have dropped that envelope there? The boy tells me he never left his side while I was at Twatutia, and Smith most certainly had not strength enough to go outside my door. I cannot help thinking that in the envelope we hold the key to Smith's past life, that by it we could find out if there is any one who knows him, any one who cares for him. The I. G. must know, of course, and it may only have been a circular after all," he added, carelessly flicking off his cigar-ash.

"No, it wasn't a circular," Mrs. Bridget broke in, quite too eager to impart her news to notice how she had been "drawn" by her companion. "Why shouldn't it have been from his wife, doctor, whose place, as you rightly say, is by his side?"

It was pitch dark by now, and Mrs. Delane could not see the peculiar smile that curled the doctor's upper lip, bringing into view his huge tobacco-stained teeth.

"The right place—that would depend upon what manner of woman she is. To have left him here by himself, without ever writing to him—I have your word, Mrs. Delane, that no letter for him has ever passed through your hands—"

"Until now," Mrs. Delane interrupted, the irresistible longing to tell mastering all her prudence. "Two days ago a letter came for Mr. Smith. You were away; I had to act on my own responsibility. I could not wait for you; I carried it down, and at his own request read it to him."

"And it was well you did so, as he could not have read it himself, at least since then," said the doctor drily. "From his wife, you said?"

"I didn't say anything," snapped Mrs. Delane. "I would not have told you now if Mr. Smith had been getting better. It is

only because you say it is a serious matter that I consult you at all. Of course I need not consult you, for the matter of that, only two heads are sometimes better than one."

"Of course, of course," assented the doctor. But he added nothing more. He was going to allow Mrs. Delane plenty of rope.

"Do you know who he is, and who his wife is?" hissed Mrs. Bridget so close to his ear that Gregorius instinctively edged his chair away.

"No, upon my honour I don't!"

"He is the Cyril Russell who shot Frank Harrison in the streets of Shanghai two years ago."

"Cyril Russell? Frank Harrison? I don't recollect the story at all," said the doctor peevishly. "You forget how long a time two years is, and how a man down here in Formosa does not take a fierce interest in the Shanghai people and their doings. What was the story?"

Had Mrs. Delane been a little less eager to tell, she might have noticed how exceeding quietly the doctor received her information. But that he was listening was quite sufficient for her purpose.

"Oh, you must know the whole story, though you pretend to forget it," she said. "There was such a big scandal about it. Cyril Russell had a lovely wife, and he was—well, jealous of her and Frank Harrison. Jealous with good cause too, as I can tell you another day! So one fine afternoon, just as Harrison was leaving the Club, Russell put a bullet into him. Not meaning to kill him, it was said, but merely to teach him a little lesson. But Frank Harrison died,—a man who had lived such a fast life as his could not expect to recover,—and Russell was tried for murder in the Supreme Court. Do you remember now?"

"Ah yes," said the doctor. "They acquitted him, or said "Justifiable homicide," didn't they?"

"They acquitted him altogether, let him off scotfree. No jury, in the East at least, would have convicted him. But of course he had to disappear, and when the excitement was over every one forgot him. His wife was shipped off somewhere before the trial; no one knew what became of her. All that was certain, and has been certain, is that she was never divorced. They said he kept her for the children's sake; there were two children, a girl and a boy. I have a notion, though, that the boy died during the trial, so there can only be the girl left. And now Cyril Russell turns up here!"

"Are you sure of your facts, Mrs. Delane? Why should this man necessarily be your Cyril Russell?"

"Why? Read this."

And by the light of the drawing-room lamp Dr. Gregorius read:

"*Hakodate, May 6.*

"*My dearest Cyril,*

"*I have at last found out where you are from the Bank people, when I went to get my last money. There was a new young man, and he told me.*

"*Every time I touch the money I can't help believing that you do still love me, away down in your heart, and that some day you will forgive me, and take me back again. Why are you so cruel to me? Why do you never write? I have told you how sorry I am, and how I would do anything, anything, if you would only forgive me. That is all I want, dear, dear Cyril. For our dead Gerald's sake—my boy and yours—for poor little Ida, without a father, forgive me and take me back. I am making Ida address the envelope. I make her say a prayer for you every day.*

Your heart-broken wife,
Sybil Russell."

The doctor read the letter through twice, and then made a movement as if to put it into his pocket.

"Give it to me, doctor." Mrs. Delane almost snatched the letter from Gregorius' hand. "What do you think I ought to do in answer to this?"

"Do?" answered the doctor grimly. "Is there anything to do just now? Had you not better wait for Smith to say what he wishes done himself?"

"But you say he will never say——"

"Ah, true. Then you will be able, in a few days' time, to write and inform his widow that her letter has killed him."

CHAPTER IV.

A letter, addressed in Mrs. Delane's best and clearest hooks and claws, plentifully underlined and besprinkled with points of exclamation, went to Hakodate by next steamer.

It was deeply bordered with black, although no death had been registered at the Consulate in the meanwhile. But Mrs. Delane had felt that the importance of her missive demanded something striking to the outward eye. She wished Mrs. Smith, or rather Mrs. Russell, to get a shock; and she considered herself the only person courageous enough to give it. Mrs. Delane prided herself upon her "courage." She no more minded bustling into a "poker"-party at the Outdoor Customs' Mess than she minded questioning her luckless female inferiors on the domestic arrangements of their own houses and those of their bachelor neighbours. And, above all, Mrs. Delane prided herself on the construction of "masterpieces" in letter-writing.

Since that evening in the verandah when she had told him Smith's sad story and showed him the letter, Dr. Gregorius had avoided the Commissioner's wife. Truth to tell, he felt a little ashamed of himself for the part he had played as receiver of confidences. He tried to assure himself that he could not have acted otherwise; that it would have been waste of time and of

energy to have remonstrated with Mrs. Bridget; to have spoken out and let her see what *he* thought of her doings. He had even let her keep the letter,—to show all round the Settlement. For show it she certainly would, and come to discuss it with Smith himself, too, directly she knew he was out of danger.

For Smith, though direly, seriously ill, was no longer in imminent danger. Weak enough certainly not to be allowed to speak, or to ask questions awkward to answer. But this state of matters could not last long; and on the morning when Smith had insisted on speaking, and had given evidence of his convalescence by plentifully "bobberying" the boy, Eugen Gregorius went up the hill and demanded audience of Mrs. Delane.

The good lady was entertaining a morning caller. The harbour-master's wife, an untidy, thriftless woman with an inconveniently large family, was receiving doles of ancient underclothing and ragged furs.

"We must all be kind to her when she comes," Mrs. Delane was saying as the door opened on Dr. Gregorius. "We must give her the chance of redeeming her past and of blotting out her wrong-doings. I shall look to you to help me, Mrs. Slade."

The words, spoken in a significant voice, naturally arrested the doctor's attention. Scarcely had Mrs. Slade bowed herself out of the room when he asked:—

"Who is arriving, Mrs. Delane? Any fresh movements in the service?"

"If you had come to see me yesterday I would have told you yesterday," answered Mrs. Delane. "And I should have been glad of your opinion. Only you have seemed lately to forget that your most important patients—by important I mean those who pay you most—live up the hill!"

Mrs. Delane was clearly offended, and, as usual when offended, insulting.

"Well, what is it?" asked the doctor, entirely ignoring the last speech.

Mrs. Delane's dignity struggled for one instant with her overwhelming desire to speak. Then, flinging herself heavily into a rocking-chair, she began, very hurriedly and very defiantly:—

"You told me I ought to answer that letter, so I obeyed you. I wrote to Mrs. Russell by Wednesday's steamer and told her to come at once, if she wished to see her husband alive."

"Ach, *so*!"

Such a *so* had never before sounded in Mrs. Delane's ears. She brought up the rocking-chair with a sudden jerk, and stared at the doctor. He was viciously hitting his boot with a little bamboo switch.

"It isn't *my* fault, doctor," she began. "*You* told me to write, so I wrote. And as I wrote it came to me that here was a good chance of mending two people's lives, of reconciling them to each other in death, if not in life, of letting the child see her father again. I asked her to come at once, and wrote to Mrs. Knox in Amoy to telegraph to Hakodate that a letter was coming. I acted on your responsibility, doctor!"

Dr. Gregorius had stood up as she was speaking, and was now turning the handle of the door.

"I've done right, haven't I? Come to dinner this evening and we will talk it over. See, I was looking out some crape for her!" cried Mrs. Bridget, now really alarmed at the silence of Gregorius.

The rocking-chair went down with a bang, and Mrs. Delane positively flung herself upon the doctor's arm.

"Done right?" he said. "Oh yes, of course you have done right? You always do when you play the part of a special Providence!"

He looked her calmly in the face as he said this, so calmly that Mrs. Delane never suspected the genuineness of his praise.

But as he went down the hill Eugen Gregorius debated with himself whether in some cases killing should be reckoned as murder.

CHAPTER V.

"Doctor, I wish I hadn't followed your advice and written to Mrs. Russell to come! Suppose she goes on here as she did in Shanghai?"

Poor Dr. Gregorius had heard this speech many, many times since Mr. Delane, returned from Kelung, had ventured on the unwise remark that it would be amusing to have another woman in the place. He had suffered much for this indiscretion, had the unfortunate Commissioner, and so had the doctor. Mrs. Bridget was beginning to see there were other sides to the question.

"I suppose she will go to Kelung with her husband," Gregorius used to answer quietly.

"Oh yes, of course. How I wish she were here! Do you know, doctor, that I am afraid she will not be kindly received down at the Customs? I am quite astonished at Mrs. Slade's narrow-mindedness. And Mrs. Lucas is nearly as bad. Such a sad lack of Christian charity! As if any one whom I choose to associate with was not good enough for them, forsooth!"

Thus it had gone on, the interminable round of platitudes, the repetition of heartless gossip, of spiteful innuendo, right up to the day of Mrs. Russell's arrival. And from the Commissioner's house Eugen Gregorius had been obliged to pass to Cyril Russell's bed

to read the reproach in the sick man's eyes, and to feel that, in spite of his solemn asseverations to the contrary, his patient more than half believed that he, Gregorius, was responsible for this coming. For the doctor, in a cowardly moment, shrinking from dealing the blow, had agreed to allow Mrs. Delane to break the news to Cyril. How she had done her work he had never enquired; how she was capable of doing her task had never dawned on him until it was too late. Unfortunate Gregorius, with no consolation but an extra three fingers in his long glass!

Cyril Russell was nearly well when Mrs. Delane rushed in haste down the hill to tell him his wife was on board the steamer lying outside the bar waiting for the tide to turn. Should she send out the launch to bring her in? Or, better still, should she go out herself to fetch her?

The sick man rose with an effort, and towered, shakily, above Mrs. Bridget. She wished he had stayed in his chair! If there was one thing she disliked, it was being overshadowed.

"Mrs. Delane," he said, slowly and distinctly, bringing out each word with an effort, "I must beg you not to interfere at all in my family affairs. I myself will send and fetch my wife and child. I do not wish her to see you at all."

And send and fetch her he undoubtedly would have done, had not his legs suddenly given way under him, and he had clutched wildly at Mrs. Delane herself as he felt himself sinking back, with a roaring in his ears and a pinky light before his eyes that suddenly went out into black darkness.

Mrs. Delane had saved his fall. He was in his armchair once more, but speechless. And she left him thus to make her own arrangements for his welfare.

* * * * * * *

So *this* was the woman about whom they had made such a fuss in Shanghai! A fuss to the extent of losing a life! Mrs. Delane had always, with what seemed to her ample reason,

despised Shanghai taste. For they had never appreciated *her* there! Here, then, was a specimen of their "beauty!" Mrs. Delane felt a kindliness engendered by an immense relief, by an absolute assurance that there was nothing to dread from this woman, the minute she set her eyes on Mrs. Russell's face.

Two years of poverty, of shame and of loneliness had played the very devil with that once pretty face. Add to this that Mrs. Russell had been horribly sea-sick crossing from Amoy, and there is small reason to wonder that she looked sallow and dowdy. Her hair strayed untidily around her face, her dress was stained and shabby. The eyes were still lovely, but oh, so heavy and despairing, with such dark rings under the long lashes! A cold chill ran down Mrs. Delane's back. It was as though grave-clothes had been suddenly opened and she was facing a ghost.

Moreover, Mrs. Russell utterly declined all offers of hospitality from the Commissioner's wife. She had come to see her husband, and she wished to do so at once. She did not even seem to notice that she was no longer "Mrs. Smith" but "Mrs. Russell" to them all. She went off in the doctor's boat, leaving the amah to follow with all she had on board.

"There's something queer about her," Mrs. Delane confided to Mrs. Slade, who was awaiting her by order on the Customs' jetty. "I shouldn't wonder if she drank. And, bless my soul, I've come away without looking at her luggage and her child! I must send for the amah to-morrow."

CHAPTER VI.

Back to Kelung they had gone, the Russell-Smith family! And this without so much as saying "with your leave" or "by your leave" or even "goodbye!"

Mrs. Bridget was thoroughly disgusted when the news came to her next morning with her early coffee. She at once ordered the Commissioner to order them back, and to dispatch a special messenger for that purpose.

"But I can't, my dear," Mr. Delane urged nervously. "Kelung is his post. I didn't send him there; the I.G. did. You must apply to the I.G. if you wish him transferred."

He was swallowing his coffee at a choking rate, anxious to get out of the room. A scalded mouth was a small price to pay for deliverance.

"Hm!" said Mrs. Bridget tartly. She didn't quite see her way to writing to the I.G. But there were plenty of ways of making Mr. Delane do so.

Just for the present, however, there was nothing to be done or heard. Gregorius was away at Kelung too, and made a pretty long stay at Twatutia on his way back. Nor, when he came, could she induce him to say anything about the Russells.

And yet Dr. Gregorius might have told her much, if he had only chosen.

To him it had been a ghastly shock, a scene never to be forgotten, that meeting between the husband and the wife, between two people who had once held the whole world cheap in comparison with their great love for each other. There was still the love—or was it love? Was it not rather the despairing cringe for the master's lash, for anything, blows, insults, curses, anything except to be ignored?—on the wife's side. But on Cyril's side there was—nothing; absolutely no response. Indeed, save for a slight drawing-in of the lips, save for a faint tremble in the thin hands clutching the arms of the chair, there was no outward sign that he marked her presence. When she came forward and flung herself at his feet and kissed his hands, he did not draw them away. They only fell limp, lifeless, when she let them go, and when, regardless of the presence of Gregorius, trying to efface himself through the doorway, she moaned out:—

"You *will* forgive me, Cyril? Please, please do."

"Gregorius, I am tired. Send the boy to help me to bed."

And without deigning a glance at the now sobbing woman, Cyril Russell walked into his own room, and locked the door behind him.

Eugen Gregorius stood still in the doorway, and looked with wondering eyes on Mrs. Russell.

She was sitting in a heap on the floor, her face resting on the empty armchair, sobbing bitterly. The doctor could see the tears running down through her fingers, and hear them drip, dripping on the matting-covered floor. He was unused to a woman's tears, and they affected him strangely. His naturally tender heart melted at the sight of this great wretchedness, and an anger against Cyril, and a pity for Cyril's wife, took possession of him, utterly driving out all thought of the miserable past that had been the cause of the misery of this meeting.

"Mrs. Russell," he said, coming forward, after having tried in vain, by sundry coughings and sneezings, to make known his presence, "you had better go to bed now. Your husband is weak and tired. You should not have excited him to-night."

Mrs. Russell caught the note of sympathy in his voice at once, and lifted up a tear-stained face to him. Then she sadly shook her head.

"You are kind, doctor, but you are wrong. He will never, never forgive me. I know him; and I read it in his face this evening. I wish I had never been born!"

What more the doctor might have volunteered by way of sympathy it is impossible to say, for at that moment the door was thrown open, and a girl of some six or seven years dashed into the room, followed by an amah carrying a solemn infant of some sixteen or eighteen months. An infant with its mother's eyes, but with those eyes without soul and without expression. And as he looked at it Eugen Gregorius with a sudden revulsion of feeling grasped the fact that the wrong Mrs. Russell had done her family was one neither husband nor child could lightly forgive, one for which she herself should never have asked forgiveness.

The sins of the parents are still visited upon their innocent children. Frank Harrison's child was a hopeless imbecile.

* * * * * * *

"Master talky, wanchee see baby," whispered the boy to the doctor.

"What is your name?" Gregorius asked the little girl, in an ingratiating tone. She was a pert, spoilt Eastern child, who had been thumping her mother to induce her to lift up her head, whining "Mummy! Mummy!" without ceasing. She now looked at the doctor, with one finger in her mouth, her head tilted on one side.

"Ida Russell," she said. "Why?"

"Come with me, and I will tell you a secret," the doctor answered, in what he meant to be a wheedling voice. And with

some difficulty he got her out of the room, and delivered her to the boy, to be conveyed to her father.

Then he returned to the parlour, where the amah had managed to soothe and smooth Mrs. Russell down. The baby had been transferred to its mother's knee, and the amah was bringing in some of her numerous packages. Mrs. Russell was quiet now, had once almost smiled, when the door was again flung violently open, and Ida, pursued by the boy, flew to her mother and clutched her tightly.

"He told me I was going to see Father!" she cried, stamping her foot at the doctor, who had unwisely shewn signs of drawing near. "And it wasn't Father at all! A hateful, ugly man who wanted to kiss me, and then called me a little liar because I said we had a baby——"

"Hush!"

But when Mrs. Russell looked anxiously round to see if Dr. Gregorius had heard, he was nowhere to be seen. He was in Cyril Russell's room, by his bedside.

"What do you want, Gregorius?" came from under the sheet.

"I came to see if you wanted anything," answered the doctor, with an attempt at jocularity. "Have you any orders to give? You are almost out of my hands as a patient now."

The sheet was impatiently kicked off, and Cyril Russell sat bolt upright, looking straight into the doctor's eyes.

Gregorius flinched. Cyril's eyes were hard and stony, the eyes of a man grown desperate. Such must have been his eyes two years ago, when——

"I ask you as a favour (he stressed on the last word) to convey me, and Mrs. Russell and her family, to Kelung to-morrow. And then please forget us, as I shall try to forget the mischief you have done me."

The doctor was stung out of all self-control by Cyril's words. All his Teutonic views of chivalry, of suffering misunderstanding

for a woman's sake, went to the wall. Why, indeed, should he be misunderstood for the sake of a Mrs. Delane?

"Before God, Smith," he said solemnly, "I never did nor wished to do you any mischief. It has been entirely Mrs. Delane's doing from beginning to end."

"Ah, that is German fashion, is it not? to shelter yourself behind a petticoat," sneered Russell. "Tell that to the woman you have brought to curse my eyes with; *she* may believe you! But remember that though she is dead to me, she can never be alive to any one else. My love for her is dead, but no one else shall ever love her. She shall be as wretched as she has made me. Now go and tell her that!"

Then it dawned upon Eugen Gregorius that Cyril Russell was trying to quarrel with him.

"You shall go to Kelung to-morrow," he said quietly. "I will take the journey upon myself."

And that was how the Russell-Smith family went to Kelung.

CHAPTER VII.

And was there then no place of repentance for Sybil Russell, though she sought it diligently and with tears?

None, so far as Gregorius could see, when he went over to visit Kelung some three months later, in the fever-reeking month of September. Mrs. Delane had gone to Kelung in the meanwhile, and had returned breathing out threatenings and slaughters. What had exactly happened on that trip never transpired, but the doctor gathered enough from the hints and accusations which she freely dropped that Mrs. Delane's welcome had been anything but cordial.

"Mr. Russell should certainly be in a madhouse." So she wound up. "As for that baby, it ought to have been put out of the way long ago. A lethal chamber would be the kindest thing for it. Mrs. Russell? She probably drinks, or takes opium if she can't get the liquor. She looks like an opium-eater, and, since she has the tendency, we ought not to wonder at her taking it, considering the life she leads!"

Mrs. Delane's theories, with which she usually began her sentences, invariably became positive facts as she ended her speeches.

So it was quite decided in the solar system of Hôbé, which revolved round Mrs. Delane as its sun, that Cyril Russell's wife

was a drunkard, if not a slave to opium. As for Cyril himself, whoever heard of a murderer who was not a brute? They were evidently persons, these two Russells, who were amply fulfilling the promise their past had given.

Dr. Gregorius heard this, as he heard everything else, with an air of studied indifference. He longed to go and find out the truth for himself, but he did not venture to do so. You cannot force yourself upon some one who does not want you; and Eugen knew he was not wanted. And all the time that part of his heart which had been kept tender all these years, almost unbeknown to himself, was aching for the unfortunate pair,—for the husband with his shattered home and life, but still more for the wife whom the husband so inexorably wished dead.

But the summons to go came at last, as all things come round to him who learns to wait. It came from Cyril Russell himself. The children were down with fever, and the doctor's presence was necessary. The note was ungraciously worded, but that did not matter. The doctor could appreciate the effort it had been to write at all.

They were very ill, those children, and Gregorius had hard work to pull them round. Nor was there, indeed, chance of complete recovery for them without change of air, that almost certain cure for malarial fever. Back to Hôbé they must go with the doctor, and their mother had better come with them. She looked decidedly in need of a change.

Not a word, not a sign, had Cyril Russell vouchsafed to his wife all the four anxious days Gregorius had spent at Kelung. And now, when the doctor made his proposal, he turned on his heel and walked out of the room.

"Nasty man, Father!" repeated little Ida in her shrill voice. "He is always making Mummy cry. You will be glad to get away from him, won't you, Mummy dear? I want to go away, I do, I do!"

Mrs. Russell's face was crimson, but she took no notice of the peevish child. And Gregorius, vexed to his soul, went out to make preparations for the return journey.

"Dr. Gregorius."

Mrs. Russell was behind him. The flush had not yet died out of her face, and her lips were trembling.

"I am not going with you. I will stay and take care of my husband. The amah can look after the children. She is good, and they do not need me now."

"Neither does he," broke from Dr. Gregorius before he could check himself. "He is killing you with his silence. Good God, Madam, is not this life, which he makes you lead, a hell on earth to you? I do not think you deserve this treatment, I cannot believe it is manly, or just!"

Mrs. Russell shook her head sorrowfully. Then she drew herself up, and a flash of pride, a look from the old dead days, passed over her face.

"My husband has been always right, Dr. Gregorius. I am quite satisfied with my life."

But then she broke down again, and whispered with a sob:—

"Do you know that, just now, he has nursed Baby quite as much as he has nursed Ida? And this morning he scolded Ida quite sharply for speaking pertly to me. I think I see the beginning of the end."

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CHINA COAST TALES

BY

LISE BOEHM.

. . . un volume que les sottises humaines m'ont aisément fourni.

LE DIABLE BOITEUX.

SINGAPORE-HONGKONG-SHANGHAI-YOKOHAMA :
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No. 5.

COMING HOME

A CHINA COAST TALE

BY

LISE BOEHM.

"East, West, Hame's Best."

COMING HOME.

East, West, Hame's Best.

CHAPTER I.

IT would have puzzled a wiser head than stands on the shoulders of most people to tell which felt the most nervous: Sandy Gordon's two sisters waiting for their brother's train to steam into the dirty terminus; or Alexander Gordon himself, trying to spread himself over the whole of a first-class carriage so as to create that impression which he knew he was expected to produce, now, on his first return from the Far East.

For the day and the hour had come at last, that day and that hour of which his mother and his sisters had spoken so often, which had seemed so very far away to Sandy himself even last year, when he had known he was coming home and when he could count the time by months. Yet now, with the day and the hour, had come a shyness for which Sandy could not account, and which he resented as being unnatural to himself. For was not he a Gilltonian born and bred, and when you have said that, is it necessary to add anything else?

Yet, for the benefit of those outsiders who may still sit in Cimmerian darkness, it may be explained that Gilltown is the hub of the Universe, and that nothing, absolutely nothing, can resist the "push" of her sons. If you are a Lowlander, or, still deeper depth, an Englishman, you had better suppress the fact

in Gilltown. Now this estimate of Gilltown is not fanciful, but actually historical. The Gilltonians have justified their boasting. East and west, north and south you find them, and not in the gutter, but high up among the towers and palaces. When the Dr. Nansen of the future lays his finger on the North Pole, surely the Scotchman he will find sitting on it will be a Gilltonian. Gilltonians flourish everywhere, become everything,—so soon as they leave their native place behind them.

All through the years of his sojourn in the Far East Sandy Gordon had stalked, bearing his head on high, in Gilltonian pride. Many strange and wondrous sights had he seen, but had he ever expressed his astonishment at, or admiration of, them? No, by no means no! Awkward, uncomfortable moments he had lived through too, when the lighter-minded, frivolous Saxon, or still more unreliable Continental, had shrugged shoulders scornfully, or muttered contemptuous asides concerning him, as he steadily buttoned up his pockets against the fascinations of poker, nap, and *pari-mutuel*. It was the remembrance of Gilltown, and the dignity which was laid upon him to sustain, which had soothed him on such occasions;—for Sandy had a temper as fiery as his hair.

And thus it had gone on year after year, until Gilltown itself had faded in his memory into an unreality, into an Arcadia where it was always cool in summer, and bright and genially frosty in winter; an Arcadia whose maidens were more beautiful far than all the beauties of the East; an Arcadia where you were always certain of good, health-giving food, of real porridge and substantial cream, of scones, of shortbread and of Scotch bun,—the genuine article, untainted by tin wrappings and the voyage! Ten years and more of absence had only made the heart of Sandy grow fonder, and he had bidden his less fortunate compatriots in the East "good-bye" with a

beaming countenance. They had still years of bondage to put through for their Rachel; Sandy was free, with a sound purse and a sound body, with an assured position to return to "in his own time," and bound for Gilltown. Such a present, and such a future, leaves no room for regret for a past.

No longer "Sandy" Gordon in Gilltown either; no more the boy who had been cuffed and kicked and bullied when little, only to cuff and kick and bully in his turn as he had grown older! No, "Alexander Gordon, Esq.," now, trusted and confidential manager and future partner in one of the biggest firms in the Far East, with more power over the destinies of men in his little finger than the Lord Provost possessed in his whole body, his robes and chain of office thrown in! A "catch" indeed for the most aristocratic spinster in Gilltown, and a pride and credit to the great clan whose name he bore!

But (as before-mentioned) as the end of his journey grew nearer, Alexander Gordon felt this unusual and uncomfortable sensation which we have named "shyness" gradually creep over him, and take possession slowly and surely of his brain and of his heart. Of his brain, as in a sudden flash there yawned before him the pit whence he had been digged, the real actual home to which he had been accustomed before Fate had turned his steps Eastward. That row of miserable dwellings in a back slum of the town he was now passing through,—of what did they remind him? Surely, surely this could not be the street in which an aunt had dwelt, from whose backyard he had so often yelled defiance to the engine-drivers on passing trains, in those holiday visits which had been such treats only some fifteen years ago? Alexander looked down on his fur cuffs, and on his brand-new yellow leather Gladstone bag, and rubbed his eyes as he mentally measured the change those fifteen years had wrought. And then a stab as of fear pierced

him. What if the change that had, all unconsciously, been wrought in him had not been wrought in his own home-people also? What if they still were what he had been?

Sandy caught his breath at the idea for one instant. Only for one; his Gilltonian pride reasserted itself the next moment. They, too, had changed; he was sure of it. Their place of abode was changed; their means had become enlarged. Prosperity had visited the family, although in one case it had come too late. Sandy's father had died only a few months ago; died without even knowing that his son was coming home. He had died "comfortable," as the Gilltown folk express it. But to Sandy that empty armchair meant a terrible void, a chill at the heart. There was no one left now to understand what he had accomplished. No praise from friend or neighbour could ever convey the glow of proud satisfaction which would have been Sandy's hardly-earned, long-expected reward for good work done. His mother and his sisters—what was their opinion worth? Women praise loudly what is not worth mentioning; they pass by with a trifling commonplace what means a man's life-blood. Decidedly, Sandy would be glad when it was this day next week.

A change of guard at the next station brought a fresh sensation. The new official eyed him suspiciously as he examined his ticket and punched a hole in the small space still remaining intact. Then he coughed, half closed the door, and reopened it immediately to say:

"It is Gilltown you are for, Mr. Gordon?"

And almost before the astonished Sandy could stammer out a "yes," the door was shut, and the traveller left to cudgel his brains trying to recall the strangely familiar voice and face.

His own cousin, Jimmy Gordon! Why, of course it was. Sandy recollected the day when it had been the pride

and delight of his heart to walk alongside this stalwart, handsome young fellow. His sister Maggie had been often chaffed about him, when she had shyly produced Jimmy's gifts and shared them with her brother,—digestion-destroying "jaw-pullers" in sticky papers! But surely all that nonsense was over by now. If not, Sandy would soon put a stop to it. Must, indeed, if his dream was ever to become reality.

For Sandy had been supported through all his social trials and slights in the Far East (where, as elsewhere, men are classed rather by their manners than by their merits) by one amazing vision, which he had purposed should become reality during his sojourn at home. That vision had been one of a glorious revenge. Those mockers, or at least one representative enemy, should be silenced, dumbfounded, annihilated, by beholding Sandy's glory in his own native place. He would invite the victim to pay him a friendly visit. The victim should accept the invitation, and then—

Who would have believed, even if he had heard it with his ears, what mad possibilities used to surge through that canny Scotchman's brain? Provosts, Lord Rectors of the University, gorgeous civic and academic robes, skirling bagpipes, bonfires . . . . But here, in the present, was Jimmy Gordon again, evidently quite determined to give his cousin the opportunity of recognising and owning him. And as this in no way interfered with the Plan (what was sauce for Sandy not being necessarily sauce for his sister), Sandy would most certainly have entered into friendly converse with his kinsman had not his attention been caught by a face passing in a rapid walk up and down the station, where they were timed to wait ten minutes, which vision suddenly froze the genial current of his soul towards Jimmy.

She was just passing his carriage when Jimmy sauntered up again, and she caught sight of Sandy's face.

"Mr. Gordon! I *am* surprised to meet you here! I never expected to see any one I knew at this Back of Beyond!"

A tall and graceful lady, whose bright golden hair shone all the brighter above her widow's dress. Handsome, perhaps, rather than pretty, and queenly more than engaging. Yet, though her presence was neither irritating nor confusing, Sandy blushed exceedingly, and Jimmy moved silently away.

"I am for Gilltown, Mrs. Peregrine-Searle. I—am glad—"

Alexander Gordon, Esq., where is your self-possession? Gone,—for the moment, at any rate. It is only later that you will remember how this woman, in the days when she was queen of the outport in which you first rubbed off your awkwardness,—how she made you her butt, her laughing-stock, her *souffre-douleur*, too; and all because she knew you felt, but dared not resent, these things. For was she not the only lady in the place, and the first woman you had come across in the East? Times are changed now; her husband is dead, and has bequeathed his widow to his friends. She is poor now, while you, Sandy, are rich. And yet, and yet, in her presence you are even now as a whipped schoolboy!

"All take your places, please."

Then there was a banging of doors, and Mrs. Peregrine-Searle disappeared. Nor, when Sandy got out at Gilltown, and fell into the arms of his waiting sisters, did he catch a glimpse of her again. This was not for want of looking, however, and it struck with a chill into his sisters' hearts that their brother paid more attention to the luggage-van than to them.

CHAPTER II.

"Mrs. and the Misses Gordon
request the pleasure of your Company
on Friday, November 28,
from 7 to 11 P.M.,
to meet their son and brother,
Mr. Alexander Gordon,
of Shanghai."

There had been a great fluttering among the dovecots, and deep searchings of heart among the dressmakers in Gilltown, ever since everybody who was anybody had received the foregoing invitation; that is, about a week before Sandy's arrival. A month's notice; then the function required new frocks. The Gordons were not given to entertaining, but when they did entertain it was in style. Not a twopenny-halfpenny lemonade and soda-water dance, with meagre sandwiches, and ices with unspeakable flavours, but a solid champagne-supper "Conversazione" or "soirée" was in store for the fashionables of Gilltown.

There were heart-burnings, too; and unkind aspersions had been thrown on the heads of the Gordons by those whom they had left behind on the climbing road that leads to

position in Gilltown. Pretty Jessie Ross, the old left-hand neighbour, had nearly cried her eyes out when the dweller on the right, Rhoda Stewart, the homely-featured daughter of a stonemason who had developed into a successful building speculator,—when Rhoda had been bidden to the *soirée*, while she herself had not been asked. Sandy had been her playmate, always, in the old days. Why was Grace Gordon so unkind? Precisely because—he had been her playmate.

The amount of calls Mrs. Gordon received during the week following the issue of her invitations was quite without parallel in the family history. All the mothers with eligible daughters—and there were many such in Gilltown—brought these young ladies to be inspected by Mrs. Gordon. Every one who had ever known, no matter how slightly, one of the Gordons, came with the express intent of being invited. That time of triumph was very sweet to old Mrs. Gordon. For years she had been obliged to eat out her proud heart with vexation at seeing her Grace, her Maggie, flouted by other girls whose claim to gentility was only one generation higher up. There are so many little ways of leaving girls who never had a grandfather out in the cold at a public dance, or a charity bazaar! Now, the Gordons' enemies were their footstool, and they were, either in a friendly or in an envious manner, the talk of the town!

Sandy too, on his arrival, entirely approved of what had been done. He stipulated, indeed, for liberty to invite a few friends should he happen to meet them,—friends, he was careful to add, who should in no wise be connected with Gilltown. A few acquaintances in the Far East had settled in various parts of the surrounding country. He might chance to meet them.

"A few Chinese mandarins?" hazarded his mother. That *would* be grand, though perhaps inconveniently so!

"No, no, mother. I wouldn't bring a Chinaman into your house. I meant ladies, gentlemen, friends—"

Sandy felt himself getting hot. But, luckily, getting hot does not shew in a blush on a tanned skin. He had chosen his victim; not, as he had formerly planned, from the male sex, but from the female. The woman who was to be dragged at his chariot-wheels should be the one on whom, of all others, he had always longed to revenge himself: Mrs. Peregrine-Searle.

In the meanwhile, here he was in Gilltown—in the handsome house which had been his father's last care and pride—as totally cut off from the old child-life as though it had never existed. He could not picture his father in the midst of this luxury, in these fine rooms and statue-guarded corridors; and thus the blank which he had so dreaded to find, the empty arm-chair which had given such a pang in anticipation, these things simply were not. His sisters likewise had completely changed. Grace, shy, sensitive Grace, had become hard and assertive. Out of sheer self-defence; but how was Sandy to know this? Maggie had developed into a nervous giggler, who was treated as a child by her elder sister. And Sandy himself—Alec they called him now!—realised in a flash how much he, too, must have changed, by the nervous, hasty kiss which his own mother, arrayed in a silk that literally stood by itself, had bestowed—upon his forehead!

They were discussing him now, these three women, he felt, when they had wished him good-night and left him to his blazing fire (Gilltown is cold in November) and luxurious silk quilt and chilly embroidered linen sheets. Sandy half wished that everything was not so grand, that his boasted Gilltown home was not so close to his own description of it. Something was wanting, and something more than his

hard-headed money-making father. Decidedly, the softness of the East, the family-feeling among the foreigners there, the want of ceremony, the carelessness of unconventionality, had affected even this stolid Gilltonian. Home-coming was not all he had imagined it would be!

And in another room hard by, his mother, her stiffness laid aside with her silk, was trying to soothe herself into the belief that her Sandy was just the same, just as much her own dear boy as he had been when she had caned him soundly for falling asleep in church during the sermon after a heavy Sabbath pudding.

CHAPTER III.

Gilltown by daylight, after a shivering night in those chilly linen sheets, was naturally another disappointment. The view out of his bedroom window, of other houses with precisely similar windows, walls, and grey slate roofs, was not pleasing to eyes that had beheld, and admired in spite of themselves, some of the grandest as well as most entrancing scenes on this earth. And then, how low the sky seemed! The clouds were almost touching the slated roof opposite, and through a drizzling Scotch mist the umbrellaed passengers splashed to and fro.

Still, for a dweller in the East a walk is a necessity, and since neither Grace nor Maggie would hear of venturing out, and his mother seemed totally engrossed in the kitchen, of which, indeed, she was altogether the governing and moving spirit, Sandy wrapped himself up in his greatcoat and went out into the rain alone.

It was all new ground to him for some half-hour. Here he remembered fields; but on them had now sprung up endless rows of suburban villas, detached, semi-detached, or arranged in flats, but all with pretentious names and white-lace-curtained windows. There, where an old farmhouse had once stood,

a gaily-painted tram was starting: doubtless a good investment. His eye noted, with a painful surprise, the number of injured persons that passed him. Eyes, arms, legs, were missing. Could it be that in former days he had beheld these sorrows without being conscious of them? Or, was this the price Gilltown had to pay for its rising manufactures?

Even the High Street had changed. On all sides old and dilapidated shops were being replaced by shining plate-glass windows and handsome buildings. Down the street Sandy sauntered, marking here and there a once familiar name. And as he walked, the feeling of disappointment, of crampedness, of having grown out of and beyond everything, gradually faded from him, and he held up his head as a proud son of Gilltown once more.

But he also became conscious, as he walked on into parts more familiar, that he was the cynosure of neighbouring eyes. And what was exciting attention soon became evident. The High School boys, as miserably clad and as dirty little urchins as are to be found in the British Isles, rushed after him to jeer at his hat. Now Sandy was wearing an elegant Terai structure, suitably adorned, such as is affected by the fashionable in foreign parts. Angry to find himself a source of amusement to these mudlarks, he quickly turned down a side street near the docks, and found himself in front of his old home.

Fashionable this quarter certainly was not, and poor and shabby the house looked compared with the elegant "West End" mansion his people were now occupying. But there must really have developed in Sandy, during his years of absence, more of sentimentality than exists in the breast of the average Gilltonian. For he actually, though temporarily, regretted that this was no longer his home.

No longer his, but surely no stranger dwelt in it. For a familiar brass-plate on the door bore the name, *James Ross, Junior.*

The plate was unmistakable, though how it came to be here was most mysterious. James Ross, Junior, had been his father's partner in old days. "Junior?" He must be very senior by now. Indeed, James Ross had once been old Gordon's master. But that was before Sandy was born. He had been over-fond of that strong "usquebagh" which, together with porridge, is all a Highlander needs in the way of food. From master he had sunk to partner; so much Sandy knew. But what since? That he should learn when the bell he had unconsciously pulled had ceased clanging in the old way along the echoing stone-paved passage, and when the door should be opened.

After all, perhaps he ought not to have been surprised at the name on the door. For the widow of James Ross's only son had been Sandy's next door neighbour, and James Ross's granddaughter had been his (Sandy's) first love and professed sweetheart. A grave-looking, thin, ungraceful slip of a girl she had grown into before Sandy had left Gilltown, quite unlike the rosy-cheeked, curly-headed, dirty-faced little maiden of his High School days. Strange that his sisters had never once mentioned her in their half-yearly letters (the Gordons were not a letter-writing family); stranger still that Sandy himself had so utterly forgotten her, when everything in the old Gilltown life had seemed so deeply imprinted on his memory! But the door was open now, and the familiar reek of strong tobacco rushed upon him as he asked, peering into the darkness of the passage, if Mr. Ross was to be seen.

Straight into the old parlour, where the old horse-hair sofa in its ancient place, the chairs, even the initials scratched in the corner of the window-frame made Sandy doubt whether

he had really ever been away, the old man dragged him. Then he drew Sandy to the window, turned up his face to the light, felt his shoulders, examined his hands, and, holding him at arm's length, eyed him critically from head to foot. This done, he wrung both Sandy's hands, and clapped the unfortunate visitor on the back with a vigour that would have felled any one but a Gilltonian.

"You favour your mother," he remarked in a satisfied tone. "Sit you down, sit you down, I'm glad to see you. Jessie, my girl, bring the whisky and the glasses! I'm all but a teetotaller now, but we must drink your health, Sandy my man, we must drink your health!"

The order was called at the foot of the staircase, up which Sandy had heard some one beating a hasty retreat. For a few minutes there was a good deal of shuffling of feet overhead, and then Jessie herself, his old friend and confidante, Jessie, stood before him with the bottle and glasses.

And Sandy, boor that he was, paid no attention to her after the first greeting. Certainly the room was very dark, and Jessie kept persistently in the darkest part of it. But he never turned his head towards her for more than a passing glance, and devoted his attention entirely to her grandfather. Was it possible that Alexander Gordon, who had been used to Mrs. Peregrine-Searle and her mates, felt shy before his old playmate?

Not exactly. But the change that had taken place in Jessie was so astonishing to him that he felt that, should he once allow his eyes to rest on her, he would not be able, in this particular room and under these particular circumstances, to keep himself from staring her out of countenance.

Not that Jessie Ross had become a beauty in the ordinary acceptance of the term. She had only—changed completely. In truth, she was simply a straight, well-built, dark-eyed,

wholesome, though pale-looking, Highland girl. Her greatest glory was indeed what her fellow-townsmen least appreciated: her hair, which waved back in ruddy-gold frizziness from a dead-white forehead. No artificial means were needed to compose that coiffure. The plain dark blue serge set off the trimness of the girl's figure. The one mistake in her attire was her attempt at adornment: a gaudy tartan ribbon fastened with a shabby enamelled brooch.

But it suddenly flashed across Sandy's memory, as he slowly walked homewards, that this very brooch was an old friend. He himself had given it to Jessie as a "Hogmanay," the New Year's Day before he had sailed.

CHAPTER IV.

"Let me look over your list, mother," said Sandy, that evening, stifling a yawn.

He had come home to a room full of guests, sitting in an atmosphere redolent of hot-buttered scones, with the cake-baskets of his youthful Sabbaths filled with "tea-bread," *Anglice*—buns and small cakes. He had walked about, a cream-jug in one hand, and a plate of eatables in the other, wishing, oh, so heartily, that his deft-handed "boy" in Shanghai had been there to take his place. The rich furs and the perfume-laden handkerchiefs had given him a sickening sensation of suffocation. A lady's "day" is one on which all her male relatives should be out.

But they were gone at last, even to the stout old lady who had sat out every other visitor. Gone, after staying at least an hour apiece! And the two girls had betaken themselves to the little parlour in which they seemed to spend most of their lives, keeping the blinds solemnly lowered in the drawing-room except on state occasions.

It was very cheerless and very stiff, that drawing-room. A handsome gilt clock under a glass shade had stuck fast at six o'clock. Under other glass shades, or arranged four-square

on inlaid cabinets and tables, stood grandly-massive ornaments: candlesticks, mosaics, alabaster vases, all as certainly ticketed as to their comparative values by their settings as though the shop-labels were still attached to them. Sandy's own contribution of curios matched with amazing harmony. There stood a magnificent specimen of Ningpo carving, here three huge blue "Ming" ginger-jars, and yonder a set of Cantonese carved solid ivory chessmen. He had sent no more; but Sandy had spent on his few gifts a sum worthy of this drawing-room.

Just now all this barbaric display of wealth without taste jarred on him. Perhaps it was because he was tired, perhaps he had a touch of malarial fever from the damp, perhaps his mother's new friends—he knew not a soul of the company he had stumbled upon—were slightly heavy, or perhaps the visit to the old house had stirred him more than he knew himself. Whatever the reason, he felt weary and, strange to say, he felt lonely also. So, as his mother, evidently loth to leave him to himself, and yet longing to be in the kitchen, from whence came an ominous smell of something burning,—as she hovered near the door, jangling in an exasperating way her bunch of keys, Sandy turned round in his armchair and asked for the list.

"Certainly, Alexander," Mrs. Gordon replied with alacrity. "Grace has it. I will tell her to bring it to you."

And she was about to make her escape when her son stopped her hurriedly.

"Don't go, mother. Come here and speak to me."

Mrs. Gordon gave a despairing sniff, and then came slowly towards the fire. She, too, wanted to speak with her boy, wanted it with the indescribable longing which training, and circumstances, and the blunting of the affections that comes from constant repression, can never crush out of a mother's heart. But what a pity that the talk should be at the expense of a burnt joint, of possibly smoked potatoes? . . . .

Moreover, although he had asked her to come and talk to him, Sandy did not at first seem inclined to speak. He fidgetted at the bars of the grate with his boots—his father's old trick!—and bit furiously at his ill-grown moustache. Mrs. Gordon was on tenterhooks. In fact, she was about to make a desperate rush for the door when Sandy began, speaking quickly and with a crimson hue stealing up the back of his neck:—

"I have been to see the old place, mother."

"No, no," Mrs. Gordon broke in anxiously, as though denial of the deed done could undo it. "You didn't go there the very first day, did you, Sandy?"

Sandy took no notice of this interruption. He went on, looking straight into the fire:—

"The Rosses have gone down in the world, have they not? And the old story, is it? Strange that the old man should have taken to the whisky after he had seen what it did for his son!"

"I'm not the one to blame him, Sandy," his mother put in eagerly. "No, nor your father either. He always said 'Jimmy Ross is no man's enemy, but his own.' 'T was your father who put him into our old house, and I've always told the girls that it won't be my hand that puts him out. Nor yours neither, Sandy, if only for old sake's sake."

"Who thinks of turning him out?" Sandy asked vaguely. "There's not one of our family who would be so blackly ungrateful as to forget what we owe to them. But the lassie, mother, and the laddie Jock? Who has looked after them?"

Mrs. Gordon glanced warily at her son.

"Your father gave them both a good schooling—schools are alike for rich and poor in Gilltown, you know. But Jock turned out a wild lad, and we were forced to send him to

South Africa. He was his father's son, poor lad; and yet he was good at heart. I doubt me that even your father was sorry when we heard he was dead. But we could not keep him here, Sandy, and our Grace sees now we were right. She was sad for the lad for many a day, and I think it has damaged her a great deal. But your father aye stuck to it that it would not do, and Grace, I'll be sure, thinks the same now."

So even Grace, prim, dignified Grace, had had her own romance, her own little love-story! Small wonder she had changed so utterly,—small wonder it seemed to Sandy to-night. To-morrow morning, after a sleep over it, and by the practical light of a grey Gilltown day, Sandy would scorn his own softness, and give his father right, a thousand times over. Grace to marry a drunkard, the son and the grandson of drunkards! All the ethics of Gilltown, all the dogmas of sober, sensible, scientific mankind, cried out against such a crime. But at night, and when one is tired, things wear a gentler complexion . . . .

"Look," Mrs. Gordon went on eagerly, opening a massive photograph book. "Here, Sandy, is the piece of white heather Jock gave her the last time they went up Ben Livat together. She found it lying away not a fortnight ago. 'Rubbish!' she said, and threw it down. I lifted it, Sandy, I could not help it. Clean forgotten, as a dead man out of mind!"

Sandy took the spray, and handled it mechanically. But his thoughts were not altogether occupied with the luckless Jock and the heartless Grace. Something else was troubling him, a question which he had been longing to ask all the evening. It came out now, aided by an introductory and portentous sniff:—

"Is Jessie Ross coming to the party, mother?"

"Oh dear no," Mrs. Gordon answered, in a tone of flurried decisiveness. "Our girls don't know her any more.

She isn't in their set. She has to teach in the Board School to earn her living. Oh no, we don't know Jessie Ross any more!"

And fearful of prolonging the conversation, Mrs. Gordon gathered together her keys and her train, and fled. Not to the kitchen first, but to the parlour, where Grace and Maggie were engaged in tearing off the clean half-sheets from the piles of notes that covered the table.

"Sandy has asked if we have invited Jessie Ross. I am half sorry we haven't, girls, seeing—"

"Nonsense, mother," said Grace decidedly. The Rosses are not in our set. If Alec says anything more about them to you, send him to me. I will tell him their history, and that will be quite sufficient."

And with Grace's mouth set for fixed purpose, Mrs. Gordon did not venture to tell her daughter that she had already told that same history with fuller details than Grace was ever likely to give.

CHAPTER V.

Sunday in Gilltown is most decidedly not a lively day. So the Gilltonians seem to think, at any rate; for they shorten it as much as possible. First, by getting up very late; secondly, by partaking of so heavy a meal in the middle of the day that a siesta of at least three hours' duration is necessary to "make the digestion;" and lastly, by brewing extra strong toddy and going to bed at an unmentionably early hour. Thus, clipped at both ends and compressed in the middle, the average Gilltonian finds his Sunday—just endurable.

But to Sandy Gordon, fresh to ponderous Sunday puddings, and awake and hungry in the morning hours before the household dreamt of stirring, Sunday was no day of joy and gladness. He had gone to church in the morning, this being a sign of respectability rather than of conviction in Gilltown, whose inhabitants, perhaps to display their orthodoxy, perchance their millinery, choose by preference those churches which are farthest removed from their dwellings. Thus did the Gordons; and Sandy had sat next his mother, whose pride in her son had showed itself in an embarrassing finding of places, loud whispering, and general officiousness. Not till the sermon

began, and Mrs. Gordon had composed herself for a nap, with her eyes solemnly turned on the preacher's face, did Sandy venture to look about him.

And there she sat, in a side-seat half under the gallery, in that section devoted to "free" sittings, and therefore the worst, the most uncomfortable, the lowliest in that church,—Jessie Ross, with the same blue serge gown half covered with a cheap jacket, her glorious hair shining from under *such* an old and shabby hat! But Sandy noticed none of these details, noticed nothing but the face.

For Jessie's eyes were fixed on him in such an eager gaze, with such an utter disregard of all the rules that denounce staring, that Sandy could not have gone away without seeing her. Her eyes had compelled him to look, and having once looked, they prevented him from turning away again.

And yet the look in Jessie's eyes was not all, scarcely at all, one of admiration. This Sandy perceived at once. Nor was she "making eyes" at him. Indeed, after the first few moments Sandy began to doubt whether she saw him after all. For she did not blush, nor drop her eyes, nor give any sign of recognition. She seemed gazing into him, through him, beyond him. . .

A hard cough in the pew beside him broke the spell. Grace had turned round, and was deliberately following her brother's eyes. Suddenly Jessie's pale face flamed like a Gilltown sunset after a rainy day. And Sandy, turning to seek the cause of such an effect, saw Grace's mouth drawn down in its most contemptuous manner, and her eyeglasses slowly drop to their accustomed resting-place on her muff.

* * * * * *

It was a silent, uncomfortable party that gathered round the Gordon table for the Sunday early dinner. There was something wrong with Sandy, and something wrong with Grace, and between the two poor Mrs. Gordon felt a guilty

chill, partly caused by Grace's sharp and east-wind tone of voice, partly the result of reaction from the excitement she had laboured under in church. Had she, after all, displeased Sandy, made too great a fuss over him? Was anything wrong with the joint? Could she have forgotten her boy's favourite morsels? For there sat Sandy, sulky and taciturn. His plate went away almost untouched, he frowned a refusal of the pudding, and shook his head impatiently over the almonds and raisins. And finally, without inviting any one to accompany him, he rose abruptly from the table and announced that he was going for a walk.

"What is the matter, Grace?" asked Maggie before the door was wellnigh shut.

"Only that I caught Jessie Ross making eyes at him in church, and he saw me frowning—"

"He saw you, did he, Grace? And this is why he is so angry? I do not think it kind of you, Grace, to anger him about that lassie. After all, we owe everything we have to her family."

Grace had risen while her mother was speaking, and was standing with her back to the table.

"Jessie Ross shall not marry Sandy as long as I can prevent it," she said in a harsh voice. "You have surely forgotten their family story, have you not? They have been our curse in the past; we are done with them now!"

"She'll just drive him into it with her pride," grumbled Maggie, as Grace was heard moving about overhead. "She couldn't marry herself, and now she won't allow any one else to be happy!"

There was a tinge of regret in Maggie's voice that alarmed old Mrs. Gordon into instant dignity.

"Grace is right, Maggie," she said. "We owe it to your father to keep to ourselves,—though it is sore enough sometimes, God knows!"

CHAPTER VI.

Along the neatly clipped hedges of suburban villas; up the road, black with Sunday crawlers, that led from the town into the country; then across the lanes that dipped down towards the river, Sandy sauntered moodily that Sunday afternoon.

He was very offended with Grace, and justly so. Was he, after all these years of independence, to come back to be ordered, and spied upon, and controlled as of yore by this same Grace? She was welcome to rule his mother, or his sister; but himself? No, a thousand times no! He would be friends with whom he chose; he would do more, he would champion those oppressed by Grace's "overweening conceit." It is to be feared that Sandy made mental use of adjectives far stronger than are to be found in school dictionaries. But the occasion justified "Shakespearean" language. He would get the better of Grace in this very matter too! The more he thought about it, the more resolute he became that Jessie Ross should appear at the Conversazione—just in order to spite Grace.

"Mr. Gordon! what merciful Providence dropped you down here to-day!"

Sandy's start was one of surprise rather than of pleasure. And yet here was the very woman he had been so anxious to

find, so concerned lest he should not meet, standing straight in front of him, leaning over the gate that led down a winding avenue to one of those old-fashioned, damp-mildewed, but eminently aristocratic houses which are the abodes of ancient county-families.

Sandy knew the house quite well. Therein dwelt Sir James Johnson, a rake whom old age and money difficulties had reformed long years ago. The Johnsons of Saltwells,—all Gilltown knew them, and respected their shambly paintless waggonette, their hungry splendour, their penniless lasses with long pedigrees. And here was Mrs. Peregrine-Searle with them, Mrs. Peregrine-Searle who had been accustomed to the best of everything, whose table had ceaselessly flowed with champagne, whose house-bills and dress-bills must have totalled up in a very few months to more than the six Miss Johnsons could ever hope to possess in their whole long lives!

For a moment Sandy was quite too staggered to answer Mrs. Peregrine-Searle's greeting. Then he recovered himself, took off his hat (why did that simple action cost him an effort in her presence?), and stammered out a few words.

"You are wondering why I am here," she said in a gracious voice. "Old Sir James is my husband's uncle, and as I wanted to come to Scotland I wrote and invited myself. I was wishing just now I hadn't,—and I verily believe you are wishing the same! I saw you coming down in the train (of course, you remember), and I watched you being embraced at the station. You didn't look, and you don't look, as though you were enjoying yourself!"

Sandy felt himself colouring up. He put on his hat again, and gave a dignified sniff of displeasure. Mrs. Peregrine-Searle had not changed for the better, it appeared. Perhaps it would be safer not to invite her after all—

A hand covered with rings of shining sapphires and diamonds was gently but firmly laid on his. The Chinese twisted gold cable slid down her wrist and struck him over the knuckles.

"Mr. Gordon, please, as a favour, come inside and walk about with me. I have longed so much to see a China face, to be natural again, if only for five minutes. It is so deadly dull here; they are all so good! And to-day I feel fit for suicide. And I can see you feel as I do. Come, there's a kind man!"

Marvellous! A big drop fell on the hand that was now tightly clutched. And Sandy, looking up amazed, perceived a second drop slowly running down Mrs. Peregrine-Searle's cheek. He silently moved inside the gate.

"I didn't mean to say anything unkind just now," she said apologetically, actually drawing out her handkerchief. "Goodness knows I envied you enough, coming home to your own people and to a welcome. While I—ah! may you never—"

Sandy felt uncomfortable and perplexed. He sent a pebble flying with his stick, and sniffed sympathetically.

"I was so glad to see you coming just now," she went on. "I could have fallen on your neck and embraced you. To see a China face; to be reminded of the dear old days! I think I could welcome my bitterest foe—not that you are one! Tell me, Mr. Gordon, don't you find that no one understands you in this country? Are you not possessed with a wild desire to do something to shock somebody? To give just a tiny "swear" as you are passing some one extra solemn, for the pleasure of seeing that some one jump! I am always shocking my uncle and my cousins. I simply can't help it. I don't know that I say or do anything strange; but *how* they look at me! How glad I am I saw you! You won't forsake me now, will you? Spend the afternoon with me, and let us help each other to get through this interminable day."

Interminable did it prove to Sandy after all? It seemed to him that that Sunday came to an end all too soon. For after they had walked for an hour, talking on subjects barred in Gilltown households on the Sabbath—at least in Sandy's home and at Saltwells House, Mrs. Peregrine-Searle insisted on taking him indoors and introducing him to the Laird. And Sir James Johnson had shaken hands with him, with Sandy, the whilom artisan's son, and the eldest Miss Johnson had poured out execrable tea into a cup of the finest porcelain, and the youngest Miss Johnson had brought him musty morsels of cake and microscopic slices of bread and butter. After this there was of course no reason for Sandy to stay; indeed, his mother was probably anxiously awaiting his return. But Sir James courteously invited him to come again; and Mrs. Peregrine-Searle, who, to her cousins' scandalisation, walked up the avenue with him, announced her intention of making his mother's acquaintance.

"And thank you for your kindness, Mr. Gordon."

What kindness? Sandy vaguely wondered. He felt his canny Scotch head slightly turned, and now that he was well on his way home, in a drizzling Scotch mist, he resented the feeling. Yet try as he might, he could no longer think of Mrs. Peregrine-Searle with the rancour he had formerly borne her. They two had something in common, if no more than the fact that they were fellow-exiles, extras, encumbrances, in the lives of other folk, who had no place for them, and who, though they might welcome the coming, undoubtedly would speed the parting guests. Home for Sandy meant no longer El Dorado, Elysium, an ideal Gilltown, but Grace, and Sunday dinners, an eternally grey sky, and a spying-out of his every action, look and word. And for Mrs. Peregrine-Searle? Why, there was no home for her, only a literal craving for and dependence on the crumbs from another's

table. Poor Mrs. Peregrine-Searle! Was she often hungry at Saltwells?

It was no longer to triumph over her, but with a satisfaction that was absolutely unselfish, that Sandy Gordon bade his mother send an invitation for the great Conversazione to Mrs. Peregrine-Searle, after a due warning to have the drawing-room in constant readiness for her expected visit.

But Grace's look of quiet triumph irritated him into this rider:

"I will have Jessie Ross invited too, mother. No one shall say of us that we turned our backs upon our old friends when we fell in with the Johnsons of Saltwells. Write Miss Ross an invitation, and send her a liberal cheque for her dress. If I don't find this done within twenty-four hours, I shall do it myself!"

And thus ended the interminable day.

CHAPTER VII.

The fortnight that intervened between the first Sunday at home and the great Conversazione passed for Sandy in a most perplexing whirl.

The many invitations he received, the welcome he got when, quite by himself, he wandered about his old haunts, the respectful way in which the city magnates listened to him, the honour which, unprophetlike, he was accorded in his own country,—these things, delightful as they were, would have left him philosophically calm had he been in his usual frame of mind. True, he put on the semblance of preferring the society of his old acquaintances with a greater zest because he could see how Grace disapproved of his "low" tastes, and how she resented his refusal to be drawn into the select circle of her female intimates. But the satisfaction of demonstrating to Grace that she had absolutely no control over him was not sufficient explanation.

If Sandy had had the courage to examine his own feelings, he would have discovered that his perplexity arose from the fact that he alternated daily between two extremes—the one being the pleasure he derived from the society of Jessie Ross, the other the satisfaction of feeling that he was the man distinguished by the regard of Mrs. Peregrine-Searle. Either extreme

brought with it a disturbance of the balance of his mind. When Grace turned up her nose at the Rosses, Sandy felt a desire to scorch her up for ever by announcing his intention of marrying Jessie. His intention;—there would be no courting, no anxious uncertainty in the matter. But again when, after that for-many-days-delayed visit from Mrs. Peregrine-Searle, Sandy came home to find his mother quite flurried, with her cap all awry, and Grace in such a state of abject humility that with her he might easily have "swept the floor,"—then the hard, worldly side of Sandy's nature, that hardness which had gained for him the position he now held, reasserted itself. He felt he was born for better things than a marriage beneath him. What a social standing would not a Mrs. Peregrine-Searle as wife guarantee him! And then the face of Jessie, pretty, timid Jessie, who had no notion of how to enter a drawing-room, far less of conversing when once inside it, faded out as the primrose pales beside the beautiful perfume-breathing hyacinth of the hothouse.

On Saturdays then, at tea with old Ross and his granddaughter, Sandy was amply but simply contented. The years spent in the gorgeous East, the bright colours, the luxurious life, were wiped as clean out of his memory as though they had never existed. But on Sundays, morning now as well as afternoon, lazily lying at Mrs. Peregrine-Searle's feet on the big rug before the study fire, or walking with her and talking in the unconstrained manner born of common experiences, carefully clearing the way for her silk-lined skirts, or drinking tea with the Laird, who politely made the self-same enquiries about eastern customs every time he saw Sandy,—then Jessie Ross, and the dingy house near the harbour, and the days of the plaid brooch and of his little sweetheart, became unreal as a fairy-tale, as a previous state of existence, as a dream out of which he had long ago awakened.

And his mother and sisters, watching his expression as he came home day by day, waited in anxious suspense as to how it would all end. To his mother, either choice must bring sorrow. But better, far better, Jessie Ross, with all the possible chances of an inherited taint, with her poverty, her ignorance of the world, than this Mrs. Peregrine-Searle. Better Grace's wrath than that woman's sneer! With Jessie, she might perchance lose Grace, but never her son. With Mrs. Peregrine-Searle, Sandy was gone from her eyes for ever.

Whatever Grace thought of the new acquaintance, she wisely kept all comments to herself. And so the great Conversazione loomed nearer and nearer, until Sandy, waking up one fine morning, found that the day had actually arrived, the day on which, as he had been lately telling himself, he was to finally make up his mind.

The house was full of workmen, draping with flimsy art-muslins the handsome carvings and great staircase. Ladders and housemaids' steps confronted him at every turn. He ate his breakfast in a small china-cupboard, and then, to the evident delight of his womankind, betook himself down the town for an indefinite period.

Before the largest flower-shop he paused, and began to examine critically the bouquets displayed in the windows. Sandy Gordon before a flower-shop! How times were changed! Ten years ago it would have been an optician's, fifteen years ago a "tuck" shop. And now, here was Sandy designing, and ordering, and watching grow up before his eyes the most expensive bouquet procurable, to be sent by special messenger to Mrs. Peregrine-Searle.

But when the bouquet was dispatched, he still lingered about the shop. Lingered in the doorway, blocking up the entrance, heedless of the frowns or shoves of would-be

purchasers. Then he came shyly back to the counter, and asked the liveliest, brightest-cheeked, merriest of the shop-maidens:—

"Have you got a sprig of white heather?"

The girl stole a glance of mischief from under her long lashes.

"Surely you remember, Mr. Gordon, that it is only pressed white heather you can get in Gilltown this time of year! We have none, but maybe they will have some at your home."

Have some? Sandy shuddered at the thought of the home "some." But the girl was watching him; so he turned away and took up a cluster of glorious brown and gold chrysanthemums.

"Shall I send these to your address, sir?"

"I will take them myself, thank you."

Coming home from the side street that led down to the harbour Sandy stopped, and fumbled for his pocket-book. In it lay Grace's rejected white heather. But when the wind whirled away the faded ribbon, the true lover's knot which death had untied, Sandy still held the sprig itself. He had cut away the past; the future should decide itself for him that very night.

* * * * * *

If Mrs. Peregrine-Searle was guilty of an unpardonable breach of Gilltonian etiquette in arriving an hour-and-a-half later than she was invited, the splendour of her entrance went a long way towards condoning the crime. She at once took her place as queen of the room, and the Universe, of which Gilltown is the hub, straightway fell down and worshipped her. In her hand she carried a magnificent bouquet, in her hair glittered shining diamond stars, and by her side hung a fan of exquisitely carved ivory. She had put off all mourning, and

wore a golden-yellow satin brocade, the finest that Shanghai could produce. Possibly her raiment may have cost less than many others in the room. But whereas the worthiest Gilltown matron never seemed to lose the consciousness of her own splendour, never rose above being a clothes-peg, in Mrs. Peregrine-Searle's case the personality of the wearer was never for a moment lost sight of. Her clothes were a part of herself; she created them, not they her.

But while the people around stared in open-eyed, speechless wonder, the scales suddenly fell from Sandy Gordon's eyes, and the glamour she had been weaving over him melted away for ever. One glance at her had sufficed to bring back a multitude of bitter recollections. Those stars in her hair . . . . had meant to one of her old admirers the first step to embezzlement, forgery, a wrecked career. The fan was the price paid by a miserable husband for a humiliating silence, scarcely kept; the brocade meant the brazen risking of a good name; the golden ropes stood for the tortures of jealousy to a young bride. And Sandy, Sandy himself, was he not there? It was a great mistake, Mrs. Peregrine-Searle, to have pinned on that sparkling butterfly. That stood for your hospitality to the young Scotchman; but what had that hospitality been, after all? A debt to be paid off, an experience, the anguish of which could never be wholly forgotten. And he had been such a fool as nearly, very very nearly, to run his head into the collar again!

And thus, though Mrs. Peregrine-Searle held her high court in his home, and men and women flocked around her, and Grace was content to kiss the hem of her garment, Sandy did not join the circle. When, indeed, Mrs. Peregrine-Searle caught sight of him, he was sitting in a window corner, bending over a girl in a simple white dress, in whose hands he was

laying something—a weed it seemed—which he had just drawn out of his pocket-book.

"And so you thought I had changed, dearie? Maybe that I had forgotten you, or was going away to forget you? We Gilltown folk never do forget. If it's once, it's for always, Jessie."

Sandy spoke hurriedly, almost fearfully. He felt only too conscious of the narrowness of his escape from the "Might Have Been." Then, drawing Jessie's hand within his arm, he boldly faced the world with :—

"Mrs. Peregrine-Searle, I would like to introduce you to my future wife, Miss Jessie Ross."

No. 6.

PETER WONG

A CHINA COAST TALE

BY

LISE BOEHM.

PETER WONG.

CHAPTER I.

終遠兄弟 *Parted for ever from my peers.* . . .

IT was of no use fighting against circumstances any longer. Here he was, planted down in Chingcha*, with the prospect of passing a good many years of his life there. The question was: how could he make those years pass most agreeably?

That he was in Chingcha was, of course, a crying sin and shame. Gregory King had always lived in Shanghai, and he liked living there. He was a sociable man, a pleasant companion, and a very second-class man of business. He could sing a little, paint a little, and talk scandal unlimitedly. No longer a young man, he was still thoroughly "well-preserved." By which be it understood that he did not yet avoid any deadly dishes, but ate nuts freely, even cracking them with his very own teeth. Perhaps he was a trifle bald, but of course that is not necessarily a sign of age. At any rate, he had not yet given up being scrupulously particular about his personal appearance.

How came it he was sent to Chingcha? This was a nine days' wonder in Shanghai, and the story of his

* *Note.*—For exact geographical position, see PLAYFAIR'S *Cities and Towns of China*, No. 9,038.

banishment has not yet been satisfactorily settled. The *taipan* of his firm, Messrs. White and Smith, the well-known shipping and general agents, must have known. But he was a surly Scotchman, who never relaxed, even over a St. Andrew's dinner. Gregory King himself, though not quite as astonished as he was expected to be, declared solemnly he did not know. He had never, to any marked extent, broken the ten commandments. He had often declared himself incapable of falling in love. Was it jealousy of his brilliant social successes? History has never cleared up this point. But Gregory King was sent to Chingcha, and told he had better make up his mind to stay there for the next three or four years.

And his friends, who accompanied him to the steamer and saw him off, said it was an abominable shame, and muttered a good deal about seeing things put right before long. Then they went back home, and forgot straightway all about Gregory King.

It was perhaps a trifle difficult to keep his temper in face of the exulting joy of the man he had come to relieve. Such a shabbily dressed man, with no soul above his whisky and soda, who had let the house go to rack and ruin, and could not see decay and spiders, though both stared him full in the face. This poor ghost had not stirred outside his compound for six months at least, had been laid up with fever scores of times without any one to nurse him, and pitied Gregory King exceedingly. This was intensely exasperating. But solitude soon calmed Gregory's spirit. After three days of incessant rain and utter loneliness he resolved to brave the elements and call upon the community of Chingcha.

Anyone who has visited this moribund port knows that the river which winds through the place cuts the foreign

community completely in two. On the one side, where the Shanghai steamers lie, are old decayed foreign hongs, once gay and hospitable, now falling to pieces, or tenanted by Chinese. In Gregory King's days the only buildings still occupied by foreigners were the Custom's offices, presided over by an assistant-in-charge, and the British Consulate, where dwelt another assistant-in-charge, when he was not up-country shooting, or in the Club at Shanghai. These two were Gregory King's only near neighbours. They were also the only laymen in the place, if he excepted some half-dozen tide-waiters. All the rest of the foreigners were missionaries, and they lived on the other side of the water, where rose the city walls of Chingcha proper.

Now every one is aware, not only that the Chinese are heathens, but that a great many and various religious parties, not to say Churches, are trying to Christianise them. These missionaries are mostly confined to three nationalities : British, American, and French, and they were all represented at Chingcha, in very numerous sects. At least so Gregory King gathered from the Directory, where nine-tenths of the names in the very short entry for the port were ranged under various Missions. And it was from this same Directory that Gregory King gathered that, if he did not want to go the way of his predecessor, he must make friends with the missionaries.

The Acting Consul was out, and the Acting Commissioner just going out, when Gregory King paid them his duty calls. The Commissioner was a Russian Jew, well-known all up and down the coast of China for excessive carefulness and frugality in expenditure. But though he was notoriously unsociable, he might reasonably be expected to furnish information respecting the other members of the community, and Gregory accordingly made his enquiries.

"There are a great many ladies among the missionaries," he was told, "and of course they are all charming (with the slightest perceptible sneer). But if you want to make friends with them, you had better begin by calling at Dr. Mackenzie's Mission. He is the doctor, the only one we have in the place, and lives with his cousins, a Mr. and Mrs. Brown, and their family. Good-bye. You will easily find the house: the only red brick one along the river bank."

And the Commissioner escaped, feeling he had lost quite ten minutes out of his walking time, which disturbed the even tenor of his mind for the rest of the day.

Shrugging his shoulders, so as to mentally shake off the inhospitable dust of the Customs' premises, Gregory King drew on his gloves, and went forth to pay his calls on the other side of the river.

Pleasant indeed to look upon, even on a cloudy November day, with a north-easter blowing in his teeth, was the missionary settlement of Chingcha. All along the river bank, a little way outside the city wall, which formed an almost romantic background, were dotted well-built shadily verandahed houses, facing due south, and securely sheltered from the cold winds. In front of these substantial roomy houses, gardens, well-stocked and carefully cultivated, sloped towards the river, where trim little jetties or garden steps gave easy access to the water. At the back of the houses, following the line of the city wall, ran a wide path. And a little higher up, at a bend of the river, stood the only red brick house, the one which Gregory King was to visit first.

Certainly the trip across in the ferry was chilly enough, but it was not long, and Mr. King soon found himself under the shelter of the city wall, able to look about him without having to hold on his hat. The path, too, was not a solitary

one. Every now and then a Chinaman passed, perhaps conversing in an elevated key to a companion some eight or ten yards behind. And, surely that was a foreign figure! Gregory quickened his pace until he got almost on a level with a young couple who were sauntering slowly along.

No, the man was a Chinaman, dressed in foreign clothes; Gregory ought to have known him a long way off, by his heavy clumsy build. Unmistakably a native, witness even the thick coarse hair, which covered what of his head could be seen under an English clerical hat. No amount of European dressing or culture could ever conceal the birth of this young fellow. Perhaps his clothes rather showed off how truly Asiatic he was.

But his companion, a young girl of about twenty, was just as unmistakably European. The hair was of that warm brown colour vulgarly called auburn. Not red, but that burnished brown which is associated with the name of Burne-Jones. Of course Gregory King could not as yet see her face. But he groaned in spirit and was exceedingly troubled, not to say mentally hurt, at the garments in which this lady was arrayed. It was not only that they were of an atrocious colour, make and material (a staring red and black plaid skirt surmounted by a black cloth jacket trimmed with rusty satin), but that the skirt was hopelessly crooked and hung uneven, the coat was unbrushed, and the young lady's hair seemed on the point of descending, requiring constant support from hands encased in yellow cotton gloves. And yet her figure was pretty enough, her step firm and light, and her face, which she now half turned towards Gregory, was absolutely a pleasing one!

Here, however, was the gate of the red brick house. The young couple passed out of sight round the corner of the city wall.

CHAPTER II.

天生此一世人而一世事姑能辦也 *When God made man, He gave him powers to cope with the exigencies of his environment.* . . .

Had any one, in his Shanghai days, told Gregory King he could ever be as comfortable in Chingcha as he found himself half-an-hour later, he would have laughed him to scorn.

But in that half-hour he had undergone some afflictions. First, he had been made to wait nearly ten minutes outside the gate, getting chilled through, and endangering that delicate tenor voice which was his joy and pride. Then, when admitted inside the door, he had been shown into a damp and icy state-room, where his teeth had chattered, and his artistic eye had smarted by reason of sundry crude and terrible tapestries, woolworks, and other atrocities with which this chamber of horrors was decorated. But into it had come a veritable angel of deliverance, though she was neither young nor beautiful. For Mrs. Brown was a most cheery, cordial, buxom little lady, and when she came bustling in Gregory King felt his evil quarter-of-an-hour was over.

Yes, it was wretchedly cold, and the stupid coolie had forgotten to light the fire! Would Mr. King—she scarcely

liked to ask him—come into her working-room? She had just dismissed a women's class; that was how he had been kept waiting. There was nobody but herself to do woman's mission work! Dear Maggie was of so little use, and dear Papa so full of his Chinese studies, and—"thank you, Mr. King, yes, the second door, and you'll excuse the untidiness of the room!"

Certainly he would have, and much more than he was asked to excuse, in view of that lovely fire, and the two ancient and very soft armchairs drawn up on either side. Mrs. Brown insisted on his taking one, carried off his hat and stick, rang the bell and ordered tea: in short, succeeded in making herself charming. What man, even the greatest and noblest, is above being petted and waited upon? Gregory King fairly basked in this sunshine. Of course it was his due, and what he had always been accustomed to. But was it not after all something to be wondered at, in this Bœotia? Why had he never before cultivated missionary society? Was it possible that there were other Mrs. Browns in Chingcha, who gave him comfortable armchairs, poured him out tea without saying any grace over it, and delicately insinuated how flattered she was by his visit? Gregory felt quite sorry when a banging of the outside door and a tread of heavy footsteps along the passage, was followed by the entrance of Mr. Brown himself.

Here was a typical missionary, Gregory thought with a mental sneer. Tall, thin, with lank faded brown hair, long and untidy whiskers, a mouth drawn down at the corners, and restless little green eyes set close to the nose—here was a Stiggins, if ever there was one. That mouth with its thin lips, opening over very inferior artificial teeth, looked, to Mr. King's eyes, as though it could relish "a drop" in secret. But of course he was wrong, for Mr. Brown was in reality a great Temperance man. Still, it must be admitted that the visitor did not feel drawn to him, and was, in fact, just about to take

his leave (he had only sat by the fire for half-an-hour before the Rev. Samuel Brown appeared) when the door once more opened, and the young couple he had seen walking outside came in.

Not in the order usually followed in polite society. The young Chinaman lounged in first, leaving the door half open for his companion. He looked shy and sulky on being confronted with the stranger. Gregory's manner, too, was not calculated to put him at his ease. He nodded to the young man, who was rather nervously introduced as "Mr. Wong," most superciliously, and then fixed his eyes with intense curiosity on the girl who had followed him into the room.

Perhaps it was not polite of him to stare so at her, but he was a man of the world, and as such did not waste his manners where they were not required. For in that half-hour's talk with Mrs. Brown he had found out that "Maggie" was her stepdaughter; and the order of arrival in the room had shewn him of how little consequence "Maggie" was in the household. And yet she was a pretty girl, to an artist such as Gregory King imagined himself to be. That red-brown hair and eyes, that pale waxy complexion—she might almost have stepped out of a Grosvenor Gallery frame! But to a Chinaman, to an ordinary unæsthetic Englishman, to a Philistine in short, Maggie Brown must have seemed plain. Nothing striking in the way of features, nothing that did not require fitting dress and background. And for dress, she had not even the benefit of tidiness, while for background and setting there was the homely, hideous missionary room. Who but Gregory King would have seen she was worth looking at twice?

The first looking at, however, had been enough to make Maggie feel uncomfortable. Her hand was hot and moist when Gregory took hold of it in the introduction, and she retreated to a more secluded part of the room while he made his farewell. Mr. and Mrs. Brown both accompanied him to

the gate, the little woman smiling gaily at him round the severe husband's elbow. As he passed the sitting-room window he saw the scowling face of Mr. Wong. Then the gate banged behind him, and he set his face towards his solitary home.

One figure passed him on the city side of the river. It was a tall gaunt Englishman, wrapped in a great cloak, with a very ancient sun hat and long grey beard.

"The doctor!" thought Gregory King, and rightly. For he, Dr. Mackenzie, was a man of whom even Shanghai knew, and whose portrait had graced more than one local journal. He was a missionary doctor, full of zeal and (some said) madness, who had been the hero of some great riots a couple of years ago. Chingcha could not hold more than one such light, and no one but a great light, or a great maniac, would go about in such guise in November.

When Gregory King turned to have another look at the strange figure, he found the doctor had halted, and was looking after him also. But, as though ashamed of having been found guilty of such curiosity, Dr. Mackenzie did not return Gregory's salutation, only fled towards the red house.

"A queer lot," Gregory mused to himself as he crossed in the ferry. "But I don't see where anything better is to come from. The mother is larky, and the girl worth studying. If only she didn't dress so vilely!"

Near home he met the Commissioner, who having walked himself into a good temper, greeted him with what was meant to be a winning smile.

"Ah, you have called upon the beautiful and accomplished Madame Brown? Quite charming, is she not? And Miss Maggie, and her *fiancé*, you saw them too?"

"*Fiancé!* What do you mean?" asked Gregory. A flash of what the Commissioner was going to say revealed to him in one instant the curious household he had just quitted.

"He? Monsieur Wong I think they call him. Did you not see him?"

"But, Commissioner, you don't mean to say—Damn the man!" Gregory King added to himself, as the Commissioner walked briskly off without even wishing him "Good evening."

"Well, there is no accounting for tastes," Gregory King said to himself as he sat down to his lonely dinner that evening. But it was not the taste in crockery of his predecessor that he was execrating.

CHAPTER III.

取妻如何匪媒不得 *In marrying a wife how do we proceed? Without a go-between it may not be done.* . . .

Maggie Brown's taste still puzzled him that day two months.

During those two months Gregory King had become, if not reconciled to Chingcha, at any rate quite accustomed to its society. Now this involved some slight self-sacrifice on his part, and would have occasioned a little astonishment, not to say mirth, to his old acquaintance in Shanghai. For, if not an infidel, Gregory King was at any rate one of those who behind the term "Agnostic" so often shelter a hazy poetic unbelief which saves them the trouble of going to church, or subscribing to charities—in short, making themselves generally uncomfortable in this world without the prospect of any definite return in the next. But in Chingcha Agnosticism and Atheism were one and the same; and so Gregory King, with the good breeding of a thorough man of the world, kept his religious opinions to himself.

His family had always belonged to the Church of England, he told Mr. Brown, whose family having been artisans were always spoken of as "in business." But as the Church of

England missionaries in Chingcha had long ago given up trying to convert their fellow-countrymen, Mr. King took to patronising the Presbyterian service, where, in an ugly little chapel every Sunday afternoon, either Mr. Brown or Mr. Wong discoursed to a very small remnant, often consisting of only Mrs. and Miss Brown and Gregory. The last, it is to be feared, did not listen with the same attention to Mr. Wong as he vouchsafed to Mr. Brown. But of course that was the preacher's fault.

For, as he plaintively told Mr. Brown on one of the few occasions in which he found that excellent gentleman in solitary possession of the house, never until now had any one taken any pains to interest him, Gregory King, in missionary work. Doubtless the clergy of Shanghai were very earnest men, and their work amply blessed, but they were not of the stamp to influence men. They were, to speak candidly, only fit for ladies' classes and Bible readings. Never till now had Gregory felt that there might be something in life worth living for beyond taels, dollars, and cents. To all of which Mr. Brown listened with what he would have called in a missionary report "devout thankfulness." And he commissioned his wife, who was nothing loth herself, to be very kind and friendly to this most intelligent young man, and rebuked Mr. Wong more than once for reminding him that he had preached twice out of his turn in the little English chapel.

No, Gregory King was simply dull, not insincere. The society of his fellow-creatures was necessary to him. And then he was annoyed and irritated by an opposition there was to him. Annoyed, because it was kept up by beings so infinitely inferior to him; irritated, because it centred around the only interesting person in the place.

Of course this person was Maggie Brown. But, though she might be interesting to a Gregory King, it was certain,

astonishing though it was to this outsider, that Mr. Peter Wong rather considered he had honoured her by choosing her as his wife. This discovery was far more amazing than that her stepmother thought her plain, for after all looks are greatly modified or set off by dress. And Maggie was so shockingly untidy, dreamy, unpractical, everything calculated to irritate the commonplace stepmother! Still, what glorious tints would come out in her hair, if only it was fastened up securely, and the jeopardy of the hairpins did not so wholly absorb Gregory's attention! And why, oh why, would she wear the hideous tartan, and why did she wear those dreadful cotton gloves? Such shapely hands, so chapped and freckled! But even in that state they were more pleasant to look at than Mrs. Brown's podgy sausage fingers.

Peter Wong's opposition was, naturally, beneath Mr. King's notice. Who can feel anything but amused at the hostility of, say, the cat of a house? Further, Mr. Wong's dislike of Mr. King was distinctly disapproved of by Mr. and Mrs. Brown. They felt just a trifle embarrassed by the innocent assurance with which Peter dropped into the most comfortable armchair, a trifle vexed that he did not realise it was his duty to wait on the ladies at tea-time, open doors for them, and avoid certain topics of conversation in their presence. Up to the time of Gregory King's arrival the Brown family had looked upon Mr. Wong as a genuinely good, intelligent young fellow, "quite good enough for poor Maggie"—quite good enough to take to England with them as a show-specimen on their next holiday. How interesting the old ladies would find him! How subscriptions to the Mission would flow in, and how much more room there would be in the house for the two little step-sisters now at school. Mrs. Brown herself could make nothing of Maggie. Perhaps she was not exactly suited to be Peter Wong's wife, but are not

most marriages made between unsuitable people? And do they generally turn out so badly after all?

Mrs. Brown firmly believed that marriages are made in heaven. That this might account for so many turning out badly on earth had never suggested itself to her. Had she not herself been married by photograph, without ever having seen her husband, much less known him? And was she not a living proof of the success of such marriages? By the aid of such feminine logic she arrived at the conclusion that she was doing her duty by Maggie, an unthankful and deceitful girl, in sanctioning her engagement. Nevertheless, even she had had secret misgivings of late as to whether this distinct descent in the social scale for her step-daughter did not implicate and lower the whole Brown family also.

But Gregory King's greatest opponent, the one who most resented his introduction into the family life, was not Peter Wong, nor Maggie Brown,—indeed, she could scarcely be reckoned as an enemy—but the doctor: Neil Mackenzie. And the doctor, as he was universally styled, though innocent of any degree, and unacknowledged by any university, British or American, was a great power in the Mission and in Chingcha. He was an enthusiast in the most outrageous sense of the term, a man of iron will and *physique*, of boundless influence among the Chinese. A quack he undoubtedly was, a maniac many of the more sober-minded said, but no one denied he was honest, single-hearted, and devoted to his work. Whatever he undertook, from building a chapel with his own hands to forcing a nominal Christianity on a whole village, that he accomplished. His feats, of endurance or of strength, bordered on the miraculous. Naturally, however, this great "Apostle of Chingcha," as he was fondly styled by his Mission in England, had great faults as well as great virtues. He could not brook a rival, nor even an equal. And in consequence his fellow-

workers were always insignificant, second-rate men, against whom he railed for idleness and fondness of the loaves and fishes, but whom, it must be confessed, he would have hounded out of the Mission had they dared to attempt to follow in his footsteps to a martyr's glory. With an almost childish conceit he combined an equally childish simplicity, which made him an easy tool in the hands of his more clever Chinese converts. He distracted the Acting Consul, and very nearly drove him to delirium tremens, by taking up the most ridiculous convert squabbles. Thus, when a Christian Chinaman, having defrauded his heathen neighbour, was about to suffer punishment at the hands of the authorities, Dr. Mackenzie was the refuge of the distressed convert. And he, "as per Treaty," invariably insisted on the wretched representative of Her Majesty bearding Taotais and District Magistrates in utterly unlawful endeavours to go against native justice. The doctor was never so supremely happy as when the Consul was sullenly refusing to take up his cases, the Taotai was swearing, and he was writing or telegraphing to the Mission Committee in England to lay such and such a matter before the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

Now, for some inexplicable reason, Dr. Mackenzie was very fond of Peter Wong. The young man was certainly amiable enough, but slow and lazy to an appalling degree, which last perhaps may have been the quality most appreciated by the active, nervous doctor. It rested him, mentally, and served as a kind of opiate to his brain, to have a talk with, or rather to, Mr. Wong. There was a great deal of steam in Dr. Mackenzie which must find its escape through some safety-valve. Peter Wong was his valve. And on his side, Mr. Wong was more human, more responsive, more European so to speak, with Dr. Mackenzie than with any one else. It was to the doctor he had first confided his desire to marry an English girl, "like

Miss Maggie," and it was the doctor who had suddenly caught up the idea, not even formed in the young man's mind, that marry Maggie Brown he should. Vague dreams of a world-brotherhood cemented through the union of the Oriental with the Westerner had floated before his mind for many years, and now with a concrete instance ready to create, Dr. Mackenzie felt he could not hesitate. With a haste that utterly took away Mr. Wong's breath, and which somewhat amazed himself, he had planned and then precipitated this engagement. And now Peter Wong confided to him all his troubles, difficulties, fears and hopes, culminating in his dislike to Gregory King. And while Dr. Mackenzie blamed Peter for ungrounded prejudice, he himself was unconsciously influenced thereby. Perhaps Gregory's manner to him had not been quite as wise as it might have been, for Dr. Mackenzie was not above being conciliated.

But as yet Gregory King had only enjoyed the opposition of the doctor and Peter Wong. It gratified his self-conceit, for he would far rather they disliked him than that they ignored him. It would be much more amusing to win over the first—of course Peter Wong didn't count—than if the whole household had with one accord fallen on his neck and embraced him. And perhaps, who knew ? he might not after all be kept so many years in Chingcha. He had plenty of good friends in Shanghai, and they would surely find him, Gregory, necessary to their enjoyment before long.

So when Mrs. Brown invited him to a birthday celebration in the middle of January, he accepted only provisionally. He was going for a run to Shanghai, and did not know whether he would be back in time.

" Why did you ask Mr. King, mother ?" said Maggie, as soon as the gate had closed behind that gentleman.

" It is my table, Maggie, and not yours," answered

Mrs. Brown blandly. "Next year, when you are married, you will be able to ask any one you like—and they will be at liberty to refuse, if they like."

Mr. Wong laughed. He liked these references to next year. But Maggie didn't. Her face turned a shade whiter, with anger, and then she got up, went out of the room, upstairs into her own bedroom, and there walked up to the glass and looked at herself.

And then she drew from her pocket a little picture. It was only a chromo from a newspaper, but she handled it carefully, flattening it out, and comparing the face therein portrayed with her own in the glass.

The result was a satisfactory one. Maggie Brown evidently admired the picture, and by admiring the picture admired herself. For the two faces were wonderfully alike.

How had she come into possession of this picture?

It had chanced in this way. A few days before, Maggie had had a stormy interview with her stepmother over some neglected domestic mending. Maggie had forgotten all about this mending in the absorbing interest of a book taken on the sly from Dr. Mackenzie's library. For she was fond of books, in an altogether uneducated fashion, and whenever the doctor was away on one of his raids into the interior, Maggie would steal into his library, and lay secret hands on whatever intellectual food she could find there. In that room lay heaped up treatises on the burning questions of the day, pamphlets on Socialism, on Agnosticism, on Atheism, side by side with French novels in an English translation, a most miscellaneous collection, not always orthodox or even moral. Dr. Mackenzie deemed it his duty to have, if not to read, both sides, though probably his bags of teeth extracted from the jaws of suffering natives filled him with greater pride than his well stocked library. But Maggie read his books in secret and puzzled her

brain over them, and was convinced by the one side in theology, till a stronger argument threw her on to the opposite side. And all this she did without guidance, without telling any one. Surely she was a deceitful girl. And of course her person and her duties in the household were neglected, and Mrs. Brown was perfectly justified in finding fault with her.

Her summing up was, perhaps, undeserved.

"After all, Maggie, it mayn't be so much your fault. We all know your poor mother was hopelessly incapable, kept your father in misery, and was regretted by no one when she died."

What could Maggie do but dart a look of the most utter contempt at Mrs. Brown, and fling herself out of the house?

Luckily she had her coat and hat already on, and so she had the satisfaction of banging the front door immediately—a feat which has not the same effect on the person to be crushed if an interval of time has elapsed since the offence. Maggie walked to the ferry, crossed the river, and set out for a tramp along that desolate wind-swept piece of barren ground known in Chingcha as the Recreation Ground.

She was not likely to meet a soul there now. The Commissioner, the only man known to frequent it, and that on account of its loneliness, must be still safe in his office. Just three o'clock! Yes, there was the warning whistle of the steamer, the opposition one to Gregory King's firm, which ran on alternate days, and was now about to leave for Shanghai.

Often before Maggie had walked herself calm on the Recreation Ground, and gone home to smile on Peter Wong as the being who would deliver her from the unpleasantnesses of her present life. But she was not going to have solitude now. A foreigner was coming round the bend, near the broken wall that marked the ruin of what had once been intended for the Public Flower Garden. It was Gregory King.

"Good afternoon, Miss Brown," he said, gallantly taking off his hat, and turning round to walk with her in the style of an old acquaintance. "Why are you walking here by yourself?"

And when shy Maggie made no reply he looked curiously, but with obviously meant kindness, into her troubled face.

"Why, what's the matter? Has anybody been scolding you? What a horrid shame!"

How could Mr. King see she was in trouble? Maggie's astonishment at this prevented her making any reply.

"That stupid fool of a Wong doesn't know how to take care of you. None of them do," went on Mr. King. "What was the trouble about?"

"Nothing at all," put in Maggie at last. "At any rate"—And there she stopped. She was not going to confide in Mr. King, that was very certain.

"At any rate what?" asked Gregory. "Good heavens, Miss Brown, why don't you make a friend of me? Surely our two heads together would be better than your pretty one alone."

"Pretty one!" retorted Maggie angrily. "Why do you take the trouble to talk nonsense to me, Mr. King? I am all right."

"Look here, Miss Maggie," broke in Gregory, suddenly changing his tone to one of earnestness, to a tone Maggie had never heard from him before, because it wasn't his natural one, "look here, Miss Maggie, I'm not a man who pays compliments. And if I say you are pretty it is because you are just like a picture I have got in my pocket at this present moment. It's an illustration out of a Christmas number, and it's the very image of you, just as you look now!"

And out of one of Gregory King's great-coat pockets came the little chromo.

"I cut it out, because it was so like you. I'm going to keep it for the same reason. Would you like to look at it? Well, you can't see it now, the wind would tear it to pieces. But I'll lend it to you to look at by yourself, on the condition you don't let anybody else see it. Can do?"

It was too tormenting to see little flashes of colour waving about in the wind, as the picture itself was kept steadily turned away from her.

"I promise," she said, looking hastily around to make sure no one was overhearing her. And the picture was immediately folded up and put into her hand.

"Don't look at it now," Mr. King said. "I want you to talk to me. Only for a little, because at that corner I turn off home. Tell me something about yourself. To begin with, why do you dislike me?"

"Dislike you! I'm sure I don't," said Maggie hurriedly, though it is to be feared she was not quite considering the truth in so speaking. For up to the present she had disliked him very much. Quite groundlessly too, as she now perceived in a moment.

"Ah, but you do," said Gregory plaintively. "You are so absorbed in Mr. Wong. How can you throw yourself away upon—Pardon me," he broke in again. "I have no business to speak to you like this. You must not resent it, though. Tell me you forgive me."

Here was the turn. Gregory King held out his hand with a beseeching air.

What could Maggie do but take it? And say "Thank you, Mr. King," for something or other. Oh yes, she was thanking him for the picture.

But her ill-temper was quite gone by the time she got home again. And as for Mr. King, as he walked briskly home he was quite satisfied with himself. He had done a friendly

act towards a pretty girl. If only she would tell Peter Wong, how angry the Chinaman would be! Gregory King found himself wishing to make the young man angry. Anything to relieve the monotony of Chingcha.

And if she didn't tell him, it was better still. Why better Gregory King did not decide in so many words. But he had always delighted in mysteries and secrets, even on the most insignificant subjects. This loan of a picture looked promising for, at least, a mild flirtation with Maggie. And such an amusement would suit his taste, for a time at any rate, better than even the purring attentions of tea, toast, and comfortable armchairs of Mrs. Brown.

But Maggie got no chance of returning the chromo, in secret, for a good many days. In fact, it was still in her possession when the steamer carried Mr. King off for a week's visit to Shanghai. Still, neither Mrs. Brown nor Mr. Wong knew anything about it. And Maggie herself no longer listened with approving silence to Peter Wong's angry speeches about Mr. King's rudeness.

CHAPTER IV.

子不我思豈無他人 *If, sir, you do not love me, is there no one else?* . . . .

"Mr. King has come back from Shanghai with a bad attack of influenza," said Mr. Brown at tiffin.

"Indeed? Then I suppose we shan't have him at your birthday party, Lucy," remarked Dr. Mackenzie.

He had suddenly returned from an up-country raid, and was eating voraciously.

"I don't expect he will be able to come," went on Mr. Brown. "Perhaps you had better go over and see him, Mackenzie."

"I have not been sent for yet," returned the doctor stiffly. He rose as he spoke, and walked off to his study, as he invariably did when the conversation had taken an unpleasant turn.

And the unlucky Maggie had three of the doctor's books in her room, which she was dying to put back in his study! What if he should miss them, and raise a hue and cry after them? She had better go out, and keep away for the afternoon, till the doctor's reading fit had passed, and her mother was away calling. Then she might slip in and put them back again.

But her little stratagem was all in vain. Peter Wong overtook her before she had got to the ferry, and insisted on taking her for a walk, during which she was treated to the whole of his proposed sermon for next Sunday. And when she came home, late for tea, she found Gregory King sitting in his armchair, drinking tea and chatting with Mrs. Brown.

The two who occupied the armchairs were so engrossed in their own conversation that they took no notice of Peter and Maggie. They were left entirely to their own resources, which, in the case of Peter Wong, were not great. He subsided into an ancient rocking chair, and left Maggie to try to edge her way, if she had the fancy to do so, into the conversation.

But there was no place for her there, and she withdrew, slightly mortified, to the side of Peter Wong.

And now Satan himself entered into her. Not in the orthodox form, as a roaring lion, but as an angel of light. He filled her with shame, to begin with, at her deceitfulness in general, first, in taking Dr. Mackenzie's books, and secondly, in taking Mr. King's picture. Then he prompted her to make speedy restitution, and to ease her conscience. And so, after sitting for a while, apparently listening to the conversation by the fire, interrupted as it occasionally was by fits of sneezing from the influenza-fated Gregory, Maggie walked out of the room, went upstairs, took the three missing books from their hiding-place (among her stockings), and thrusting the little picture into her pocket, regardless of crumpling it, went down to Dr. Mackenzie's study.

"Come in!"

The voice sounded irritable. Dr. Mackenzie had wasted a good hour over his search.

"Here are your books. I took them to read."

What made Maggie so bold? Her voice sounded quite

strange to her ears, so brave was it. But her hand was shaking as she put down the guilty three on the table close to the doctor.

He turned on her in speechless astonishment, but in astonishment that had not one trace of anger in it.

"Why didn't you tell me you had taken them, my child?"

Just a suspicion of reproach in his tone, not of blame. Maggie's heart softened in a moment, and she felt a great desire to confess everything and be honest to this man, at least.

"I was afraid. Mother would have been angry."

And now Dr. Mackenzie looked at her hard, almost as though for the first time in her life he had realised she was a separate living, thinking, feeling being.

"But why did you take them, Maggie? They are not fit for you to read. You see," he went on, as though she was expecting him to apologise for himself, "a missionary must know everything. But a girl needn't, especially a girl who is soon going to be married."

Here he stopped short. Maggie's eyes were looking at him with such a hurt expression, at least so he fancied, that the tender-hearted doctor realised all of a sudden that he had touched on some tender place.

"What is it, Maggie, dear child? What do you want?"

And he came across the room to where she was standing near the door, put his two thin nervous hands on her shoulders, and looked straight into her face.

Maggie flinched. There are sometimes things in a girl's mind that she is ashamed to put into words, ashamed of even thinking. And of what was Maggie thinking, unconsciously thinking now? Surely it was Satan himself who was filling her with this strong feeling of repulsion towards her future life, as alluded to by the doctor, and towards her future husband. And as it was a temptation of the Evil One, not to speak of

folly in a worldly sense, Dr. Mackenzie could have no sympathy with her. So she resorted to prevarication, as was most natural for a woman in her circumstances.

"I wish you would help me"—her voice gave a little break here—"to educate myself. I'm so ignorant, you see."

Dr. Mackenzie was disappointed; Maggie could feel he was, for she dared not look up into his face. She felt he would see in her eyes she was not speaking the truth, and she did so want him to think well of her, too!

"I will see about your reading. I will consult Peter Wong about it."

"Oh no, don't, please, please don't!"

Maggie's voice was quite beyond her control now, and two tears came rolling down her cheeks. She was a little nervous and overwrought, that was all, and the tears were only natural. But they alarmed Dr. Mackenzie immensely.

"Don't cry, dear child, don't cry," he said, drawing out his handkerchief, such an old and ragged one it was! and wiping Maggie's cheeks. "There! there!" and he patted her shoulder softly. "Run upstairs, and wipe your eyes, and be sure I won't say anything to anybody about you without your leave."

He was very anxious to get her out of the room, being in mortal dread of hysterics, or some such feminine exhibition of nerves. And at the same time he felt sorry he had let her go without finding out what was really the matter with her.

"Something is going wrong with that girl," he mused to himself, "and she came here to tell me, and ask my advice. No, it wasn't only to put back the books. She could have done that while I was out. What is the matter?"

He had been stirring an utterly defunct fire all this time, and now suddenly realised the room was chill and damp.

"Are her father and mother unkind to her? That wouldn't matter, since she's going out of the house so soon. Ah!"

Some idea had suddenly struck Dr. Mackenzie. He was not given to thinking usually, but to making up his mind all in a moment, and to acting on the resolve thus made. He had been acting hitherto, towards this girl, on one of these resolutions: that it was right that she, the only marriageable person in the Mission, should be given to the most promising convert from heathenism. The convert was ready, willing, glad; but, was it possible? . . . .

There was a great flash of doubt in that "Ah!" which somehow sounded down the room, seemed to entangle itself in a hideous Joss in the dusk near the door, and came back uncomfortably to the doctor's ear. He was speaking his strange new fear aloud.

It was uncomfortable work, this thinking. Dr. Mackenzie stood up, and shook off his mood.

"It must be tea-time." So he went out, and into the parlour, to be free from himself.

There was Gregory King, sitting in his armchair, Mrs. Brown opposite, and Peter Wong standing near the door, like a shy schoolboy, biting his nails furiously. Dr. Mackenzie walked to the fire-end of the room, and asked Mrs. Brown for a cup of tea.

He was not half through it when Maggie's voice sounded close by.

"Here is your picture, Mr. King. I have quite finished with it."

The doctor turned round with a start. Mrs. Brown nearly dropped the teapot. And Peter Wong walked up and looked over Gregory King's shoulder at the mysterious bit of paper.

It was plain every one was confounded. Maggie herself was crimson. Mr. King alone kept his presence of mind.

"A picture, Miss Brown? Let us look at it."

Quickly smoothing it out, he held it up before Mrs. Brown, with the back carefully turned towards Peter Wong.

"Very like you, Miss Brown!" he continued, as if the likeness had just struck him. "Don't you think so, Dr. Mackenzie?"

Dr. Mackenzie's curiosity had already been aroused. He looked eagerly, though silently, at the picture.

"Where did you get it, Maggie?"

Mrs. Brown's voice was very stern. There was clearly a domestic storm ahead.

"It doesn't matter to me where she got it. Miss Brown has given it to me now—and I mean to keep it."

Gregory accompanied this gallant speech with an approving nod at Maggie, and a smile at Mrs. Brown.

Dr. Mackenzie looked from Maggie to Mr. King, and from Mr. King to Peter Wong, who was frowning furiously, and biting his nails harder than ever.

What on earth was the matter with all of them? Or rather, what kind of girl was Maggie after all?

Only ten minutes ago she had come to him, and confessed to abstracting most improper books, in his opinion, from his library. He had forgiven her that. Now here she was, in the presence of the man she was going to marry, giving what she meant to be a likeness of herself to another man.

Could it be that he was mistaken in her after all? Was she an ordinary, vain, empty-headed woman, with no regard for modesty in her desire for flattery?

Impossible, quite impossible. Dr. Mackenzie had never been mistaken in his estimate of character before. Appearances were undoubtedly against her, but there was an explanation somewhere. He nudged Peter Wong, and whispered to him a word of advice. Not to speak, but to go out of the room. The doctor felt he could defend Maggie, if it were necessary to do so, better in his absence.

But Peter Wong did not, or would not, hear the words.

And Gregory King in the meanwhile rolled up the picture, put it in his pocket, and said:

"Well, I must be off. Many thanks again, Miss Brown."

"Good-bye, Mr. King. I hope you won't find it more damaged than it was when you gave it to me."

She ought to have said this, of course. It would have explained everything, and left Dr. Mackenzie's heart lighter, and his brain less puzzled, on his evening walk. But Maggie hadn't said that. In fact, she hadn't said anything to any one; only fled, when she saw Mr. King preparing to take his departure. Fled to her room till supper-time—fled from the wrath to come.

CHAPTER V.

對影自成雙 *He and his shadow make a pair.* . . .

Gregory King was thoroughly out of temper that evening.

First grief; he had broken a tooth over an iron shot in his pheasant. Broken an excellent tooth, which showed a good deal when he smiled the smile that was so becoming to him. Of course it was the boy's fault, for having bought a pheasant killed with iron shot. But where was the satisfaction in swearing at him? The idiot understood no expression that did not begin and end with a D. He actually thought his master called for more potatoes, or, grim irony, a toothpick. A broken tooth was grief enough to last an ordinary mortal a long time.

But misfortunes never come alone. Here he was, sneezing every other minute, in a draughty room, with a chimney that smoked, the atmosphere outside growing perceptibly colder every second. His head felt like a brick, his shoulders ached, and his eyes were streaming. He was in for a severe attack of influenza, and his afternoon's expedition across the river had been, so to speak, the last nail in the coffin of his health. And, third grief, what had that same expedition brought him in the way of unpleasantness?

That scene at the Browns was a disagreeable one to recall. For the moment, maybe, he had saved himself, and let it be imagined that it was Maggie who was courting him, not he who had made the first advances to her. But Gregory's experience of the world had taught him this misunderstanding could not long continue. What would Mrs. Brown have already done? Questioned Maggie, and found out the truth, which there was no motive to conceal. And then how would he, Gregory King, stand in the eyes of Mrs. Brown, of Dr. Mackenzie, even of that Peter Wong, with his fat face and coarse black hair?

The thought of Peter Wong condemning him was the most riling part of this grief. But even now Gregory's cup was not full.

Looking back on it in solitude, between his fits of sneezing, Gregory King half admitted that his trip to Shanghai had been a failure. Of course he had told himself, before starting, that he did not expect anything to come out of it. And yet he had expected—what? No less than his recall to that earthly Paradise from this deadly Chingcha.

He had gone, and seen, but not conquered. His juniors, who had formerly looked up to, and copied, and fawned on him, were all busy doing just the same to the man who had stepped into his place. "Oh, is that you, King? How do you like Chingcha? Pretty dull, isn't it?"—that was all the welcome he had got from his own firm.

Outside the hong, among his own particular set, it was worse still. They had filled up his place, and the new friend was a more popular, a more brilliant man, than Gregory. They did not know what to do with him now, and they took no pains to conceal their ignorance.

But the ladies treated him worst. Fickle all over the world, women-friends are doubly fickle to their admirers in

Shanghai. They can there afford to pick and choose, dictate, make any terms they please, certain that a dozen docile swains can at any moment be called in to replace one rebel. This is one advantage they obtain from being so much in a minority. True, that Gregory King had been a great favourite. But two months' absence will make even the fondest heart to wander. In short, two days thoroughly disgusted Mr. King with Shanghai. It was better, after all, to be somebody in Chingcha than thirteenth at a tiffin, where he was paired off with the governess, called in to avoid the unlucky number. Of course, tiffin-parties are not arranged in an hour, and Gregory might himself, in past days, have treated in the same cavalier fashion some friend from an outport who had turned up at the last moment. Nevertheless, it is humiliating to be invited simply because you have called just as the hostess was going to change her dress for the company, and to mark your presence was not expected by the number of cutlets provided by the frugal Celestial who presides in the cookhouse.

Chingcha *was* a dreary place, notwithstanding! It rained twice as much there as in Shanghai. And, when it was fine, there was nothing to do, no one to see. Only these missionaries with their petty differences, their narrow views of society, their badly-dressed women, and their pushing familiar converts.

Here Gregory was back again at Grief No. 3. A grief, however, evidently not altogether unmixed with satisfaction. For, regardless of warning creaks from its arms, Gregory leaned back in his chair, smoothed his moustache, and smiled.

The ladies, he mused, were clean gone on him. Take Mrs. Brown, for example. She had always liked him from the first. And, ladies' man as he prided himself on being, he had known how to keep her goodwill. To begin with, he had submitted to her sympathetic ear, in strict confidence,

a few commonplace, society doubts on the verbal inspiration of the Bible, the God of the Pentateuch, freewill and predestination, and so on. And when she had, to the best of her powers and her husband's meagre library, satisfied these doubts, he had made her soar with him to the giddy heights of the Essay on Liberty. Beyond this Gregory King could scarcely go, and it was already too high for Mrs. Brown. She was in fact, he told himself, in great danger of losing her heart to him. Mr. King's past experience had taught him that to come for advice and guidance, especially on subjects of which she is totally ignorant, to a woman, is often an excellent way of making her a firm friend for life.

But at this point in his cogitations Gregory King sneezed at least ten times running. This so entirely broke the thread of his thoughts that he judged it wisest to go to bed.

To sleep? Dear me, that was not to be dreamed of. The influenza-fiend had got well hold of him, and only let him drop into a restless doze to arouse him quickly with a horrible nightmare. The lamp, which he always kept alight, though carefully turned down, sputtered, flared, and finally blew out in a gust of wind that burst open the crazy door. The boy was, of course, sleeping in some inaccessible room in an outer yard. The draught was insupportable, but Gregory feared to get up, for, shivering as he was under the bedclothes, the cold must be ten times more intense away from them.

Crack, slit! What was that? His toe had caught in a hole in the sheet, and was tearing it wide open. How prickly the blanket was! No, that wasn't blanket, only mattress below him. The lazy brute of a Chinaman had forgotten to put a blanket below the sheet! Now, the door was banging. He must get up and shut it. Where were the matches? Here was the box, put by his orders always within reach. By Jove, not a single match in it!

Gregory never forgot, in after life, the horror of that night. He had finally just dropped asleep, towards early morning, when the whistle of his, or rather his firm's, steamer aroused him to his day's work. It was a playful habit the Chingcha steamers possessed, to come into port before daylight, and waken every one by their cheerful whistling. The Commissioner and the Consul could mutter something strong under their breaths, turn round, and go to sleep again. But the unfortunate agent, sleepless night or not, had to get up, increase his influenza, lay the seeds of all other deadly diseases, and smile still.

"Only married men should be sent to outports." Gregory King had long been debating this in his mind. And a damp shirt, cold coffee, and the torn sheet settled it. If a house is uncomfortable, it is of no use to bully your Chinese servants. The only way to make life endurable in Chingcha was to have a wife to—not bully, but keep house for one.

By the afternoon, when the steamer had gone, Gregory King fancied himself so seriously ill that he thought it best to send for Dr. Mackenzie.

CHAPTER VI.

誰謂女無家 *Who can say that you did not get me betrothed?* . . . .

"Samuel, isn't it time for Maggie to get married? How long is this engagement to keep dragging on?"

Mr. Brown was comfortably in bed, reading. Ostensibly and outwardly, the *Christian* newspaper. In reality, a most fascinating account of a wonderful cure by Mother Seigel's Syrup, of symptoms almost identical with his own. Very provoking to be interrupted.

"Eh, my dear, what did you say? Yes, certainly."

"I was speaking of Maggie," returned Mrs. Brown severely. "What are you reading, Samuel?"

She had finished arranging her hair for the night in a series of wonderful little plaits, and came to look over her husband's shoulder.

"Oh nothing!" he said, hastily shutting up the paper. "I was half dozing. What did you say?"

For Dr. Mackenzie, after having experimented on an entire luckless village, and finding it equally useless for cholera, small-pox and ophthalmia, had pronounced against Mother Seigel. So it was dangerous treason to hanker after this forbidden fruit.

"I was speaking about Maggie," said Mrs. Brown reprovingly. "She is your daughter, not mine, thank goodness! And I cannot undertake the responsibility of her any longer."

"What has she been doing now?" asked Mr. Brown, composing himself to slumber in a listening attitude. For as a general rule Mrs. Brown's complaints of Maggie's ways and "tone of mind" lasted into the small hours, and only required his bodily presence, not his listening powers.

But to-day sleep was not to be suffered to visit his eyelids so early.

"She is behaving in a most improper way, Samuel. I don't like to tell you all I think about her. Didn't you notice anything this evening at supper? Dr. Mackenzie wouldn't speak to her! He is as disgusted with her as I am."

Mr. Brown had noticed nothing; but now he seemed to recall an awful stillness that had brooded over the supper table. Yes, now he realised that Maggie's eyes had been red, and that she had once looked up at him wistfully, in the old way he remembered her mother had done, long, long ago, when——

Mrs. Brown was in the middle of her story by now. Maggie's crime did not appear a great one in her father's eyes, which were softened by these old recollections. But of course he dared not express his sentiments, and, coward that he was, got out of the necessity of criticising his child by assenting to her fate.

"Yes," he said, a trifle sadly, for he was more tender-hearted than most people, his wife included, gave him credit for. "If she is to be married—and I think that is the best thing for her—the sooner the better."

"I think, directly after China New Year," said Mrs. Brown. "Exactly so. The last week in February."

"I can stand her for another six weeks or so," thought Mrs. Brown as she blew out the candle. "But I couldn't much longer."

And so Maggie's wedding was fixed for 28th February, and she and Peter Wong were duly apprised of the fact.

Both the young people received the news with perfect unconcern. This was only to be expected from Peter Wong, who had cultivated the art of appearing indifferent to the very highest possible degree. But Mr. Brown, who had been appointed to inform Maggie, felt a little alarmed, if not pained, by her almost sullen acquiescence.

"I don't fancy Maggie's very well," he said, joining his wife and Dr. Mackenzie in the parlour.

"Indeed? It is scarcely to be wondered at," said Mrs. Brown drily. But Dr. Mackenzie fidgetted in his chair, and was immensely relieved when a coolie entering with Gregory King's summons gave him an opportunity of cooling his brains by warming his body with a fast walk to the sick man's house. And, by dint of putting away all thoughts of the home disagreeables, he was in the blandest of tempers by the time he reached the ancient hong presided over by Mr. King.

His patient was, after all, not so very ill. A good many years in the Far East had made Gregory exceedingly careful of himself. Quite justifiably so, as very few of those who had come out with him, somewhere in the Sixties, had survived the whiskies-and-sodas, the *D.T.'s*, the cholera, and the malarial fevers which beset the path of the dweller in a foreign land. And so, after Dr. Mackenzie had satisfied himself that Gregory's temperature scarcely touched 100°, and that he had only to stay indoors and pile in quinine, the doctor felt so genially inclined that he dropped into Gregory's proffered armchair, and began to talk.

"The wedding day is fixed," he said, plunging, according to his wont, headlong into the subject that was uppermost in his mind.

"Wedding day? Whose wedding day?" asked Gregory.

For, though he guessed the answer perfectly, the announcement was somewhat of a shock to him.

"Miss Brown's," answered Dr. Mackenzie, abruptly. He had just realised that, after all, it was this very man to whom he was speaking who had been the cause of this determination on the part of Maggie's parents.

"Very sudden, is it not?" said Gregory. "May I ask, without any impertinence, if that little scene yesterday had anything to do with this?"

While he was saying these words, Gregory was deliberating in his mind whether it would not be wisest to make a clean breast, *i.e.* give his own version, of his share in that scene to Dr. Mackenzie. He was rather inclining towards this step when the doctor turned on him with an excited gleam in his bright black eyes.

"Yes, Mr. King, emphatically yes. The poor young girl is in need of a guide and protector, a better guide and protector than Providence has hitherto been pleased to grant her. And as she has chosen our young friend, or rather, our young friend and convert has chosen her, who am I to keep them asunder?"

Gregory King stared for a moment at his companion in genuine open-mouthed amazement. True, he had formerly heard rumours of the instability of the doctor's headpiece. True, he had heard of deeds which no self-seeking, or sane, man could have done. But never before had he heard from the doctor's own lips what seemed to him such evidence of the weakness of his intellect. Clearly this was not a man to confide in, at this time at any rate.

The certainty that the doctor was, for the time being, not wholly responsible for his words, imparted a peculiar ring of superiority to Gregory's voice, as he answered:—

"And do you then imagine Peter Wong, a Chinaman, will

be a guide and protector to a girl like Maggie Brown? She requires—some one like—" here he hesitated for a moment, then abruptly brought out—" Some one like yourself."

It was a sudden inspiration on Gregory's part to say this. He had not meant to do so when he began his sentence, he did not mean it now. But, was it possible? No, it could not have been a blush that reddened Dr. Mackenzie's excited face. It was only the fire suddenly breaking out into flame, and lighting up the long grey beard and wild unkempt hair.

" Good evening, Mr. King, I will call and see you to-morrow. But I doubt not you will be much better by then."

" By Jove!" mused Gregory, as he drew his chair close to the fire, and ill-temperedly pushed away the very grimy cat which generally occupied the centre place on the hearthrug. " Is it possible he is in love with her himself? Ridiculous!"

And then he fell a-thinking.

There was going to be a wedding. But what a wedding! He could imagine the small and stuffy chapel crowded with greasy, familiar, pushing Chinese, friends and relations of Wong, who as converts would consider they had a right to shake hands with you, criticise the bride, or even—kiss her after the ceremony.

No, luckily Chinese custom forbade that. But that creature Wong was such a fool, he would not know how to keep his fellow-countrymen at a proper distance. Most likely he wouldn't want to do so. In all probability he thought as even Dr. Mackenzie had put it, that he was choosing her. Choosing a genuine English girl!

" Dinner leady."

The dinner was a vile one, badly cooked and served. Mr. King made a meal off bread and butter and whisky and hot water. The drink would have been much nicer if it had had a dash of lemon and sugar. But there were no lemons in the house. Who ever knew a bachelor's house where there were?

Close to the fire again, Gregory King mused on at his ease.

What had made Maggie behave as she had done yesterday?

The answer was plain, to a man with Gregory's experience of women.

She was in love with him! Not to be wondered at, of course, considering what a very fascinating man he was. Poor Maggie! Everything he remembered about her conduct of late confirmed him in this opinion. She changed colour when he came into a room. Surely she had taken greater pains with her dress lately; surely her skirts had hung straighter—

Stay! was it possible that it was his own artistic eye that was at fault, that he was getting accustomed to crooked lines and irregular distances? Horrible thought! But no, ten thousand times no! The doors and windows were just as crooked to him at that moment as they had seemed when he first beheld them three months ago. For, years ago, the foundations had given, and the whole house was now leaning gradually forward.

She was not a bad girl, by any means. In fact, there was a good deal to be made out of her, by a man who knew how to manage her properly. Good looking, in an uncommon way. Quite, quite different from any Shanghai beauty. Voice sweet and low, with none of your odious provincial accents. Thrown away, absolutely thrown away, on that creature Wong.

And then, what a degradation for the whole European community this marriage was! How the Commissioner would sneer as he congratulated the "happy" pair. How he would enquire of King himself news of "his friend Mr. Wong and his charming wife!"

But why on earth did Gregory concern himself in this matter? Clearly it was no business of his—except that no right-minded man ought to look on calmly and see such a hideous sacrifice made of one of his countrywomen.

What a difference there would have been if she had been going to marry, say, the Commissioner! No, she would have been out of place there. He was too old, and his household was conducted on lines not approved of by missionaries. The Consul? He also was not a marrying man.

Eleven o'clock. The quinine was buzzing in his ears, and it was high time to be in bed. His temperature must be going up, his hands felt so hot and dry. A hot drink in bed, just before going to sleep, that was the right thing. He pealed the bell, and the rotten cord broke, after the fashion of Chingcha bells. He went out into the passage, and shouted for the boy. Answer came there none. Gregory King went up to bed in a towering passion.

"This place is ——— (a sneeze, and the sudden discovery that the window was wide open) alone. I shall have to get married after all."

And then he fell into a dreamful sleep.

CHAPTER VII.

蓄極則洩 *That which is over-pent breaks out at last.* . . .

"Dr. Mackenzie, you must stop this marriage."

The doctor was leaning back in his armchair, nervously opening and shutting his eyes. Gregory, standing on the hearthrug, was watching him intently.

"Impossible, Mr. King. It is not my concern, you see."

Dr. Mackenzie's voice was flurried, and his eyelids moved more rapidly than ever. For he was hearing with his bodily ears what a small voice had kept whispering to his conscience ever since, with shame be it said, that afternoon when Maggie had brought back the books into his study.

"Not your concern, Dr. Mackenzie? Surely you have just told me you made the match!"

Now Dr. Mackenzie had not just told him this, though Gregory King had certainly often heard it. But it was so true that the doctor could not deny it.

"In as far as such a thing can be made, Mr. King," he said with something of dignity in his voice, which to Gregory seemed absurdly out of place, "I have made this match. May the Almighty give His blessing on it!"

"Now, don't bring the Almighty's name into such an affair

as *this!*" retorted Gregory. "You try to get out of your responsibility for bringing together two utterly unsuitable persons by calling upon Providence to look after them. As though you could shift your responsibility on to God's shoulders! No, Dr. Mackenzie, these ejaculations don't deceive yourself. You are far too clear-sighted not to have seen that Miss Brown is being sacrificed, not for God's glory, but for what? To gratify her stepmother's spite."

"After all, Mr. King, these are scarcely your affairs."

There was a dangerous sound in the doctor's voice. King sat down in his chair, and drew it closer to his companion.

"You are right, Dr. Mackenzie," he said sorrowfully. "I have neither part nor lot in this matter. But there was something about your household, some influence coming I don't know from where,—certainly it couldn't be from Mr. and Mrs. Brown—" here he allowed himself to smile sarcastically—"that attracted me. I, too, have lately come to feel that there may be something in this life better than what we can perceive with our senses. I have seen that there can be at any rate one man whose thoughts are not of the earth, earthy. But when I saw a reptile like that Wong battening on your high-mindedness, taking advantage of your unworldliness to try to make himself a position in the Mission, when I heard him boasting of what he would do when he was left in charge, then I felt it was my duty to open your eyes to the serpent you were nourishing in your bosom. Ungrateful task as I know it—"

"Stop!" said the doctor, sitting bolt upright. "May I ask you to repeat what you have just said?"

The doctor was as simple as a child in his knowledge of the world; as jealous as a woman of his own position in it. Gregory King was doubtless unaware of this, as Peter Wong, poor innocent, was unaware of the sentiments just being imputed to him.

"No, no, it doesn't matter," said Gregory hastily. "I don't want to hurt the young man. Young people will talk. But: is he a fit husband for Maggie?"

Brought back to this problem, Dr. Mackenzie at once began to fidget.

"I can't see anything better for her," he said at length, standing up to go. "I think she would be happier married than she is now at home."

"I grant it," said Gregory earnestly. "She must be married, but why to Wong? Can't you think of any one more suitable for her?"

He was looking with a searching glance into the doctor's face. The corners of Dr. Mackenzie's mouth twitched. Gregory could see that even underneath the thick moustache.

"I don't know, I don't know," the doctor repeated. "I don't fancy—"

"Ah!" said Gregory quickly. "You don't fancy I, for instance, would marry her, just to oblige you? That's what you were thinking? By Jove, doctor, that *was* uppermost in your mind. Come, don't deny it now!"

Very certainly this had not been the idea uppermost in Dr. Mackenzie's mind. The change of colour in his face showed this, and his voice was not quite steady as he answered.

"It is a difficult question altogether, Mr. King. I will think it over."

"And let me know if you want me to marry her."

The doctor scarcely caught these last words. He had grasped his battered sunhat and was already outside the door.

* * * * * *

It was all very well, though, for Dr. Mackenzie to say he would think over the matter. In reality he had not the faintest intention of doing so. And, in addition to not having the wish, he certainly had not the power of thinking over any

subject. Pre-eminently the doctor was a man of impulse, easily carried away by an idea or "inspiration," and then sticking at nothing when once his mind was made up. Just now his mind was not made up, only unhinged, and so ready to receive any impression either in favour of, or against, Peter Wong and his bride-elect.

Why had the Fates decreed that this should be Mrs. Brown's birthday? Why did they oblige the doctor to spend this evening in the bosom of the family? Why did Satan put it into the luckless Peter Wong's heart to play the gallant, a part which suited him so badly? Why, oh why, was Mrs. Brown triumphantly, condescendingly jubilant? The doctor's back was up, mentally, before the evening meal was announced.

Then came the first hitch. The frugal housewife had provided eggs and bacon to open the repast, one egg to each person. Peter Wong, seated next to Maggie, was offered the nearly empty dish, containing two portions, one for himself and one for his companion. He carelessly helped himself to both.

"Mr. Wong," Mrs. Brown's voice sounded sharply, "You have taken Maggie's share as well as your own."

"Indeed!" answered Peter Wong with an attempt at jocularity, though he was blushing furiously. "Perhaps you'll take one off my plate, Maggie."

"Have another egg poached," broke in Dr. Mackenzie impatiently. "Wong, you had better hand the whole plate over to Maggie."

"Why?" asked the innocent Wong.

Dr. Mackenzie growled out an answer, which luckily did not reach his convert's ears. And the meal, kept back by the doctor's orders till the egg was produced, finished unpleasantly for most of the parties concerned.

After the table had been cleared, Dr. Mackenzie settled in an armchair, with a number of the *Lancet* to study. It was an uninteresting number, or rather, he was engaged in listening to the talk that was going on in an undertone near him.

Mr. Brown, under the influence of a good supper, was expanding with fatherly feeling.

"What present shall I make you, Maggie?"

She was sitting near him, as close as she could get. Which meant, as far away as possible from the other two. Wong was holding a skein of wool for Mrs. Brown.

"Whatever you like, father."

They were almost the first words she had uttered that evening. Dr. Mackenzie stole a look at her out of the corner of one eye. She had slipped her hand through her father's arm, and was twisting about his watchchain.

"Would you like a watch and chain, Maggie?"

Before she had time to answer, Mrs. Brown put in:—

"What absurd nonsense, Samuel! To give a girl in the position she is going to be in an ornament! Far better give her half-a-dozen spoons and forks."

"Far better," chimed in Peter Wong, laughing. "I should get the benefit of them too, Mr. Brown. Whereas it would look ridiculous in me to wear a lady's watch."

At this juncture the *Lancet* was crushed together, and Dr. Mackenzie hastily stood up.

"Is the lamp lighted in my study, Maggie?"

"It always is," said Mrs. Brown, as testily as she dared. "I look after it myself; Maggie has nothing to do with it."

"Then Brown, favour me with a few minutes there."

The few minutes lengthened into a half-hour. The clock struck ten, Peter Wong yawned loudly, and took his departure. Maggie bade Mrs. Brown good night, and went up to bed.

But when Mrs. Brown, burning with curiosity, tapped at the study door to summon them to prayers, she was not enlightened on the subject of their conversation at all. Both Mr. Brown and Dr. Mackenzie were sitting reading, as though they had done nothing else the whole evening.

And not a word did Mrs. Brown get out of her much disquieted husband all that night.

CHAPTER VIII.

信誓旦旦不思其反 *Clearly were we sworn to good faith, and I did not think the engagement would be broken. . . .*

It was on the next afternoon, as Dr. Mackenzie was nearing his own door, that he caught sight of Peter Wong bearing straight down on him.

"Things are going splendidly, doctor," he said exultingly. "I've seen a house, a Chinese one of course, that will just suit me. Quite handy to the Mission, and yet not too far away from my own family. I mean them to take Maggie in as a regular daughter, you know. They will soon get over her appearance. Do you think I ought to make her wear Chinese dress at once, and eat our chow-chow, which I, of course, like much better than foreign food? Or should I wait awhile?"

"Miss Brown must never wear Chinese dress. And I don't think she would like your chow-chow," said the doctor slowly.

"Not as Miss Brown, perhaps, but as Mrs. Wong? I shall have the deciding then, you may be sure! At any rate, I don't mean to let Mrs. Brown interfere with my household. I shall do just what I like with my own wife. We've passed the house, doctor! Let us go back."

For Dr. Mackenzie had caught hold of Peter's arm with an iron grip, and was hurrying him on.

"You are making me out of breath, doctor. I can't walk as fast as you. Do let me go!"

And the doctor did so. What was more, he stopped suddenly short. They were well beyond the house now, and right in the teeth of the wind, which was sweeping straight down the river. On one side frowned the city wall, just touched with brown here and there where the dead creeper still clung to it. Peter Wong shivered, in spite of his warm greatcoat, but his companion, without his usual rusty cloak, did not seem to feel the wind.

"Wong," he said solemnly, "my dear Peter, you must give up this marriage. It can't take place."

Peter Wong stared at him in most utterably blank astonishment. Then, thinking it was probably a joke, he began to laugh.

"Don't laugh," said Dr. Mackenzie earnestly. "This is far too serious to be laughed about. I repeat it: you must give up this marriage."

He was so evidently serious that Peter's tone at once changed.

"Why?"

"Because you are not suited to each other."

A great look of relief came into the young fellow's face.

"Oh, is that all? I thought it was something more, perhaps. If that's all—"

"It's quite enough," interrupted the doctor. "I won't allow this engagement to go any farther. You are not fit for her, nor—"

"These are all questions," broke in Peter hastily, "which cannot come up now. The marriage is arranged, the day is fixed. I cannot draw back. I should lose face entirely among my own people. I cannot think of it."

His words roused Dr. Mackenzie's slumbering wrath to an uncontrollable pitch.

"And so, to save your face—not for any other reason, you would tie her to you for life! Monstrous, unchristian, unmanly in you, Peter! I tell you, you shan't marry her, and I herewith break off the match!"

He was white with anger, and out of breath with the rapidity of his words. The wind caught his long coat-tails and whirled them wildly round his shoulders, where they seemed to meet and tangle in his ragged beard, flying loose all round his face. He looked unearthly to Peter, already nearly reduced to imbecility by cold and terror.

"You are not the one to decide, Dr. Mackenzie. You are not Maggie's father."

It was Peter's first act of rebellion, and it was made at a most injudicious moment.

"No, I am not her father," answered the doctor, suddenly turning scarlet. "But I speak with his knowledge and approval. Will you come and see if this is not the case?"

Peter would fain have resisted, apologised, taken back all he had said, left all to Dr. Mackenzie's clearer judgment. Too late. The doctor had clutched him again, and dragged him back to the house, into his own study, whither the luckless Mr. Brown had retired to compose his next Sunday's sermon in peace. The sound of a jingling piano, accompanied by a voice resembling a Jew's harp, warned them that Mrs. Brown was within reasonable distance. Dr. Mackenzie closed and locked the door.

"Mr. Brown," he began, before Peter Wong had time to expostulate, "I have broken off Maggie's engagement with Mr. Wong. Do you agree?"

"Yes," answered the luckless father, without even looking round. "I agree to whatever you think right and proper, Dr. Mackenzie."

A faint gleam of triumph lighted up the doctor's eye as he looked at Peter. But it died out as suddenly as it had come.

The young man stood motionless for a moment. His hands certainly trembled a little as they twisted round and round his clerical hat, but otherwise he betrayed no emotion.

"Is that your final decision, Mr. Brown?"

There was so much of dignity in Peter's voice that Mr. Brown felt compelled to turn round, as he answered:—

"I think so, at least—"

"Yes, yes," broke in Dr. Mackenzie. "Believe me, Peter, it is the best thing for everybody concerned. Miss Brown doesn't love you, and you are not fit for her. I'll make it up to you in some other way!"

But he had not got to the end of his speech before Peter Wong, unlocking the door, had quietly bidden Mr. Brown "good afternoon," and was gone.

The two missionaries stared at each other.

"I hope it's all right, doctor," said Mr. Brown peevishly, "I hope he won't go and get up some grand revenge, and burn the house about our ears, or some such thing. What on earth made him take it so quietly?"

"He is a Christian," said the doctor gravely, "and has taken it in a Christian spirit. I wronged him in thinking he wanted some favour in return. I will see him and apologise for this wrong."

And, acting as usual, on impulse, the doctor rushed bare-headed out of the house, and soon overtook the slow-footed Peter.

"My dear boy, my dear boy," he gasped out, "forgive me that I have had to speak so plainly. Forgive me, too, that I offered you anything in return for this act of self-denial. I have done you wrong."

Peter Wong turned on the doctor his ordinary calm face of indifference.

"I do want a favour from you," he said. "Give me a month's leave of absence, that I may make my plans for the future. I shall not be able to remain here after what has occurred."

"No," said the doctor, thoughtfully. "It will be best that you should go away for the present. I am going too. You have leave for as long as you think necessary."

Peter Wong did not thank his chief. He did not utter another word. So, with an unanswered "Good night," Dr. Mackenzie retraced his steps homewards.

It did not take him long to pack. In another half-hour he came into the study again, where Mr. Brown was crouching over the fire, a prey to terror and remorse.

"Brown," he said, in a voice that made the poor man jump, "everything is settled. Wong goes away on leave. You must tell Maggie and her mother. I am going up-country myself."

"Really, I think you might have told Maggie yourself!" returned her father in an injured tone. "We don't know how she will take it, never having been consulted in the matter. And Mrs. Brown!"

The thought of what Mrs. Brown would say choked all further utterance.

"Listen, Brown," said the doctor solemnly, so solemnly that Mr. Brown trembled all over, his nerves being already very much shaken. "Tell them to-night. And say to Maggie: 'Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.'"

"Was he a safe, a responsible guide?" Mr. Brown kept on asking himself this for the next hour. The gate had long ago closed behind Dr. Mackenzie, but Mr. Brown did not yet

feel in himself strength to accomplish the task laid upon him. But it had to be done, and so at length he rose with a deep sigh, and went forth to his doom.

And yet, his lot was not nearly so hard as the task Dr. Mackenzie had laid upon his own shoulders.

Valour and safety do not always lie in attacking a difficult situation. Very often they consist in running away from danger.

And that was precisely what Dr. Mackenzie was doing. But before he went forth into the desert he had what he hoped would be an agreeable duty to perform.

Gregory King, convalescent, though looking decidedly pulled down and older, was sitting at dinner when the door was flung open and Dr. Mackenzie entered.

Now, as the doctor had already visited his patient that afternoon, he was totally unexpected. Luckily, Gregory had never professed to be a teetotaller, so his glass of claret could cause no surprise. Still, one does not like to be intruded upon in one's privacy, without knock or announcement.

But the doctor evidently noticed none of Gregory's surroundings. He had come merely to say something, and that something was :—

"Mr. King, the engagement is broken off. May you make as good a husband to Maggie as she deserves!"

"What?" asked Gregory snappishly. "Broken off, do you say? Tell me all about it."

The doctor, however, was in no mind to stay.

"There is nothing to tell," he answered shortly, "and I am off up-country. I shall miss the tide if I don't go at once. Good night."

And he was gone, leaving Gregory wondering. But the tide must have waited for him, for half-an-hour later, as Gregory was enjoying his cigar, Dr. Mackenzie again appeared in the doorway, which he held wide open, letting in torrents of icy air.

"You will certainly marry her and be good to her, Mr. King?"

"Oh yes," answered that individual testily. "Do shut the door, though!"

The door was shut, on the outside. And Gregory King saw the doctor no more for many weeks.

CHAPTER IX.

恩愛翻成仇恨 *Hate is the end of love.* . . .

What a blessed glorious time came for Maggie then! Happiness beyond what she had ever imagined in her wildest dreams.

True, there had been some hours of misery, when her father had come and told her and her stepmother that the engagement with Peter Wong had been ended by the doctor. Not that either of the women had thought of disputing this decision. Maggie had always been brought up to believe that a good daughter accepts the husband who has been chosen by her parents, and looks upon him as her own property from that day forth—for ever, if they are married; if not, till the match is broken off. But what was hard was, not the loss of Peter Wong, but the hopeless prospect of an interminable life at home. There was no chance of escaping from it now. She would have to listen to her stepmother's taunts without the consolation of feeling that at any rate they could not go on for ever, that her marriage would put an end to them.

But next day, when Mr. King came and asked her, not through her father, to marry him! Asked it as a favour too, he, the wonderful, the clever man, so sought after and admired by every one. It was too much happiness for her.

Quite welcome, as a wholesome tonic, was the anger, were the spiteful speeches of Mrs. Brown. What did it matter now? The greatest of men had chosen her, had allowed her to be engaged to him. His condescension almost overpowered her. She listened to his, it is to be feared somewhat long-winded, stories of his friends, and of his own exploits, in adoring admiration. He was just wicked enough to make her feel, with a laughing shudder, that he wanted the gentle influence of a wife. She would, of course, influence him, and gently—for good; every wife ought to do so. Then, he was so wise in conciliating Mrs. Brown by devoting himself to her exclusively when they three were together. For would not they two, Gregory and Maggie, have all the rest of their lives alone together?

Where did Peter Wong come into these lovely dreams? Alas, it is to be feared, nowhere. He was out of sight, and though Maggie could not put him quite out of mind, she tried her hardest to do so. He was an inharmonious feature in these scenes, for he had been treated badly. Perhaps not so much by her, but certainly on account of her.

And with Gregory she had no secrets. He knew all her evil deeds, how she had taken Dr. Mackenzie's books on the sly, and how she had confessed to the doctor in the study. But Gregory, instead of being angry, had actually laughed at it all. Yes, and had promised her any and every book she wanted. They would read them together, and he would teach her the ways of the world out of them. Surely never was there a more delightful father confessor.

There was only one person about whom they did not fully agree, and that was Dr. Mackenzie. Evidently Gregory did not admire the doctor as much as Maggie had always been trained to do. Of course he didn't say anything against him, but Maggie instinctively felt the doctor was not a hero to her

future husband. This was a pity, but did not matter much after all. For by-and-bye, after they had been married a long time, and Maggie had got over her present shyness, she might very possibly be able to bring her husband to the same mind as herself on this point.

As for Mr. Brown, all remorse he might have felt for the way in which Peter Wong had been treated had long ago been swallowed up in the satisfaction of having secured such a desirable son-in-law. The letter he wrote to Dr. Mackenzie, announcing the turn matters had taken, and naming the day fixed for his daughter's marriage, was one note of triumph from beginning to end.

Maggie also put in a little letter, briefly telling the doctor how happy she was, and thanking him for all his kindness to her in the past.

"She is happy, poor child," mused the doctor to himself, as he read the two letters by a flickering oil-lamp in a Chinese inn. "I have done the right thing, and saved her from a life of wretchedness. The happiness of another is, after all, the greatest happiness we can look for on earth."

His eyes were a trifle misty, no doubt by reason of the fumes curling round him from a little charcoal brazier. He dropped the letters into the fire, and resolutely stirred them round and round till they were reduced to a grey powder. Then he gathered his long cloak about him, and piling two or three rice bags together for a pillow, lay down and slept like a child till early morning.

Meanwhile, the weeks of Maggie's engagement flew by. It was not to be a long one, for Gregory King soon tired of playing the part of a lover. Certainly, it was not a difficult part to play with Maggie. She was far too humble and grateful to expect any attentions from him. In fact, as he grew to know her better, he found she was the very model of what he

wanted in a wife. Good-looking, when properly dressed by him, of course, so that one had no cause to blush for her. At the same time modest and shy—which meant that she would never resent her husband accepting bachelor invitations. Quick, too, to note an unspoken wish, which augured well for a housewife, whose one object in existence ought to be to make her lord and master comfortable. Gregory's prospects for his life at Chingcha were decidedly encouraging. Only he never forgot that, in bestowing himself, he was giving much more than he could ever hope to receive in return from a missionary's daughter.

Mrs. Brown, greatly mollified, if not reconciled, by the way in which Maggie was treated like a plaything, while she herself was consulted on every point, was loud in her praises of Gregory. She congratulated Maggie over and over again. "It was a most wonderful piece of good luck, a great deal better than could ever have been hoped for her. What the attraction was"—and here she would break off, leaving Maggie with an uncomfortable tingling in the ears, which lasted till her sun, Gregory King, again rose upon her darkness.

But all things come to an end, even a six weeks' engagement. And Maggie's wedding-day dawned, as warm and spring-like as could be desired.

There was, to begin with, a lengthy service at the chapel. This was performed by the bride's father, and was attended by all the missionaries in the place. To tell the truth, they were somewhat scandalised by the richness of Maggie's dress (the gift of the bridegroom), but notwithstanding this they were satisfied with the marriage, which they looked upon as a distinct recognition of their power and standing among foreigners. The native Christians, on the other hand, were rather conspicuous by their absence. They had, indeed, bestowed various gifts, in the shape of pots of flowers and

ornamental scrolls, on the bride, but they did not care to attend her wedding. Their sympathies lay rather with the absent Peter Wong.

Then followed the brief and unimpressive formality at the Consulate, where the Acting Consul, a pronounced woman-hater, made them legally man and wife. After this, a sumptuous collation at the Commissioner's, who had suddenly discovered unheard-of attractions in Gregory King, and still more in the pretty girl he had chosen as his wife. And, finally, as the *taipan* had ill-naturedly refused Gregory leave of absence for a honeymoon, the newly-married pair departed to their own house.

"Welcome, Maggie, welcome!" said Gregory, with a fine flourish of the hand, as he helped his bride out of her chair. "Here is your kingdom for the future."

He would have said more, but the boy appeared at that moment in the doorway with a very embarrassed air.

"Morning time one piecey gentleman have come. Talkee, wanchee see you."

"No can see," answered Gregory shortly.

"He no go way," persisted the boy. "Have talkee, wanchee see."

And he handed Gregory a card.

Maggie's brain was in such a whirl with all the day's events that she scarcely noticed this interruption in their progress. Nor did it strike her as curious that Gregory should seem annoyed as he asked:—

"What side have got?"

"Drawing-room."

"Maggie," said her husband, "I have to speak with a stupid fellow on business for a moment. Go up to your room. The boy will show you the way, and I will come in a second."

But Maggie had not got half-way upstairs before she heard the drawing-room bell sharply pulled, and an instant afterwards Gregory called out, in a tone that struck terror to her heart:—

"Boy! boy! quick! This side!"

She followed, scarcely knowing what she did, the boy down the stairs. The drawing-room door stood wide open, and there, facing her, in an armchair, with his head thrown back and his eyelids closed, lay Peter Wong. As she shrank back with a cry of fear, fear of she knew not what, she saw Gregory go up and touch the figure. And then, horror of horrors, it gave a lurch forward, and fell heavily to the floor.

What did it all mean? She realised what in the next awful moment, when the boy picked up from the floor a small paper, with a few grains of white powder still sticking to it.

How he had done it they never found out. But Peter Wong had revenged himself, and that in a truly Chinese fashion. He had poisoned himself in his successful rival's house, on his successful rival's wedding day.

CHAPTER X.

相見何其遲 *Ah! why did we meet so late?* . . . .

"Such bad taste on his part to go and kill himself here," grumbled Gregory King to his wife, as he wound up an account of the consternation this event had caused in the Brown household. He had walked over to see his father-in-law two days after his marriage, having managed, with infinite trouble, to get Peter Wong's body removed in the meanwhile. "That shows how purely skin-deep his Christianity was. Merely the varnish on the outside of the Heathen Chinee."

Here he laughed, a vexed little laugh. For he was seriously annoyed, and Mr. Brown had not quieted his annoyance at all. That good missionary was in mortal dread of his life. The popular feeling against himself and his family, which had formerly been aroused by the rejection of Wong, was now at boiling point by reason of the young man's suicide. Indeed, the unfortunate Mr. Brown was actually contemplating immediate flight.

"I have sent a special messenger up to Dr. Mackenzie," he said, "and as soon as I get his answer I shall leave for Shanghai. My leave is due, and really none of us are safe here now."

If the missionaries were not safe, how much more unsafe was Gregory King? Even now he was keeping a good look-out on all such approaches as doors and windows, as he sat by the fire talking to his bride.

As for Maggie, she looked what she felt, utterly miserable. All her joy and gladness had been swept away for ever by this awful tragedy. She brooded over her own share in it, over the past, and reproached herself, and judged herself mercilessly, every hour she was alone. And of course she had had many solitary hours, for this suicide on foreign property had entailed a lot of trouble on Gregory. Most likely it would entail much more, and so it was quite natural that he should be thinking more of his own worries than of the poor dead man as he sat talking to Maggie.

"I blame Dr. Mackenzie most of all," he went on querulously. "He had no business to interfere with such a dangerous man as this Wong. He might have known how he would act. It's certainly a great mistake to have anything to do with missionaries!"

Still Maggie spoke not. Poor Peter! how he must really have loved her, if life was not worth living without her! Could she never, never have come to love him? A shiver at the thought of doing so ran through her even now.

"Perhaps I may get ordered to Shanghai in consequence of this row. I shan't mind the affair so much if that is the end of it."

Now Maggie stared at Gregory, in most utter astonishment. She surely could not be hearing aright.

"Yes," he said, nodding to her in answer. "The best way out of the difficulty would be to transfer us to Shanghai. I wonder I never thought of it before. I've just got time before the steamer goes to write and lay the whole matter before the firm. She won't get off till late to-night."

Off he went to his office-room. And Maggie returned to her self-tormenting.

But she was to be aided in it this afternoon. Five minutes later the door opened suddenly, and Dr. Mackenzie, looking ten times more wild, more haggard, and more ghastly, abruptly entered.

He came up to Maggie, crouching over the fire, and grasping her by the two shoulders, said in a hollow voice:—

"Maggie, Maggie, what have we done?"

This associating of her with himself touched Maggie indescribably. She turned round, and caught hold of his hand:

"Oh, doctor, I never thought he would have felt it so!"

This was precisely the thought that had been haunting the doctor. To him, as to her, the idea of a Chinese revenge had never occurred. They could only realise how they had driven Peter to his death, all unwittingly, but alas! too certainly. Maggie's conscience had already scornfully rejected Gregory's explanation of the event, as Dr. Mackenzie's mind would inevitably spurn Mr. Brown's version later on. To both the doctor and Maggie, Peter Wong must always be a human creature cut off from the light of sun through their fault.

"Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God," groaned Dr. Mackenzie, as he sank down on a chair near the table, and covered his face with his hands.

"Don't, don't," said Maggie impulsively, rising and going towards him. His grief was even greater than hers.

"So that's how you take advantage of my absence, Dr. Mackenzie! To make love in this outrageous fashion to my wife!"

Gregory was behind them. Dr. Mackenzie hastily dropped the little hand he had taken and was holding, almost unconsciously, and turned a face crimson with conflicting emotions on the intruder.

"Do you call this a Christian deed, a fit attitude for a missionary?" Gregory went on tauntingly. "What would your converts say to this?"

"Gregory, Gregory!" put in Maggie imploringly. But she had no need to defend the doctor. He could very well defend himself.

"Mr. King," he said, rising and facing him, or rather, towering over him, "You, of all men in the world, ought to have known better than to say what you have just said. But you have taught me now, what I should have known long ago, what manner of man you are."

Here he paused for a moment, and then went on, in an altered tone:—

"Guard well the treasure you have got. I shall not interfere with you. My work here is finished. I go to seek a new sphere far, far away. You have seen me for the last time."

He did not offer to shake hands with Gregory, but turned to Maggie, who was holding on to the table as though she feared she would fall.

"Good-bye, dear child. If ever you want me, come to me."

* * * * * *

But it was not till after many many days, till the death of Peter Wong had almost become a shadowy memory to him, that far away in the wilds of Western China, meditating one day at eventide over the mistakes of his life, Neil Mackenzie lifted up his eyes, and saw his heart's desire coming unto him.

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CHINA COAST TALES

BY

LISE BOEHM.

. . . un volume que les sottises humaines m'ont aisément fourni.

LE DIABLE BOITEUX.

SHANGHAI—HONGKONG—YOKOHAMA—SINGAPORE:
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1908

No. 7.

TWO WOMEN

A CHINA COAST TALE

BY

LISE BOEHM.

"Respectability is a very good thing in its way,
but it does not rise superior to all considerations."

An Inland Voyage.

TWO WOMEN.

PART I.

A LOOKER BACK FROM THE PLOUGH.

CHAPTER I.

THERE was one point, at any rate, on which all who knew her were agreed; and that was, that Marion Lawson's career in China was a great failure. When it came to discussing whether she herself was to blame for the failure, opinions were divided. It depended a good deal on the view you took of Stephen Walford's share in the matter.

Here is the story. Let each reader judge for himself.

Marion Lawson was, let us say, twenty-seven when she came out to Shanghai to keep house for her brother, the head of one of the largest and richest *hongs* (or firms) in the place. Four other sisters had gone through this farce of keeping house before her. Now they had four houses to keep instead of one; and Marion, Alick Lawson's last (and eldest) sister, having nursed an invalid and crotchety father to the grave, came out to Shanghai, as the ill-natured put it, to take her chance in the great marriage-market of the Far East.

They had been a romantic lot, those five sisters, in the days when they lived in the country rectory, eleven miles from anywhere. Long talks over a bedroom fire, or in and round a hammock between the bites of consoling apples, concerning what was

going to happen to each and all "five years hence," had quite convinced them in those days that a very special fate and career was reserved for each one. The romance, such as it had been, had quite worn off her four younger sisters when Marion, still sentimental, rather gushing, but not over-handsome, met them after many years in the East. Each sister had gone a different way. One was a leader of fashion; another had become almost fanatically religious; a third was a hopeless hypochondriac. There seemed to be only one common meeting-ground for the Lawson sisters, and that, strange to say, was a cordial dislike and distrust of each other.

To Marion, old fashioned perhaps in her loyalty to the exploded creed that her family could do no wrong, to Marion who had never dreamt that the *genus* Lawson could have a rival, much less an equal, in talent, wit, or genius, the revelation of the apostasy of her sisters from sworn principles was a terrible shock. No doubt she exaggerated the breach in her own mind; no doubt it was only because she had so limited an experience of life and of mankind that she had imagined the former state of things could survive matrimony. In short, she was both mistaken and unreasonable, —but she felt terribly lonely.

And then, since she had no set occupation, since there was not a soul in the world who wanted her, since there was nothing which it was absolutely necessary for her to undertake, nothing which somebody else could not accomplish far better, and since her old foundations were out of place, Fate too cast a stone at her, the very last and overwhelming stone, and turned even her good into evil.

For, as the Chinese have it, is it not always the sick duck that the racoon devours?

This is the way it came about.

It was a sheer impossibility for a woman of Marion's temperament, or rather of Marion's Sunday-School, Evening-Classes habit, to sit for long with her hands folded before her. Her sisters

wanted nothing of her,—as a matter of fact they rather voted her a bore, for she was no good to help entertain guests, and as for usefulness in the matter of retrimming hats, cutting out children's clothes! why, all her fingers were like thumbs. Her brother's establishment went like clockwork, under the jealous supervision of an elderly "boy" who would brook no interference. But there were the clerks in the office, some half-dozen young men, of ages ranging from nineteen to twenty-nine, to whom Marion longed to act the elder sister. So she had them up in batches, by twos and threes—Alick Lawson's dwelling-rooms were upstairs, over the offices—and tried ever so hard to make them happy.

Five of them came when they were invited, duly, and stifled their yawns as best they could. The sixth absolutely, and without any reason, refused all invitations.

Why? Marion innocently put the question to her brother on the third refusal. His answer was brief, and given in a tone which did not invite further questions.

"Walford? Of course he won't come. He is not a ladies' man."

And Marion was left to find out what "not a ladies' man" implied.

She knew him well by sight: a tall, fair, rather thick-featured man, inclining towards stoutness. A great lazy-looking giant, slovenly in his dress, who passed her on the stairs without even noticing, far less acknowledging, her presence; which last rather riled her, for Marion was quite aware of the elevated pinnacle she was supposed to occupy in the sight of her brother's clerks.

But decidedly, Walford's fellows were most uninteresting! They so clearly only came to her parties as a matter of duty, and so clearly didn't want to be made any happier by her! However dull she might be of mental vision, by the time June came, and her sisters departed, bound for Chefoo, Japan and other summer sanatoriums, Marion Lawson had at least perceived that she was

wasting her energy over the clerks. She herself was to spend this first summer in Shanghai. And the great heat settled down on her, enervating mind as well as body, till Marion Lawson's good resolutions oozed away from every pore, and for lack of someone to benefit or something to do she came nigh to that class of human beings whose lot in life it is to cumber the ground.

So she was lying, half waking, half sleeping, on a long chair close to the verandah one drowsy morning, when the "boy," with sundry judicious coughs, put his head round the corner of a sheltering screen.

"Master have got?" he asked innocently. Well he knew that Master was half-way down the river under the double awning of a houseboat. For was it not Sunday, that day of joy and gladness, of picnics and morning cocktails to the toilers in Far Eastern offices?

"Master no got," Marion answered sharply. She was not yet case-hardened to this "Sabbath-breaking." "What thing wanchey?"

The "boy's" whole manner immediately changed, and a look of well-counterfeited alarm overspread his countenance.

"Mr. Walford downstairs; Mr. Walford very sick. I think more better send catchy doctor come, if Missisy talkey all proper?"

"I can come," Marion answered promptly. And the boy gladly led the way.

Very sick indeed he looked, sick with the pallor of death to Marion's inexperienced eye, this giant lying on the office floor, a glaze over his eyes, the drops of perspiration on his forehead, his jaw slightly fallen. No one was in sight or within reach; all the Chinese servants had cleared out into the back quarters at the first alarm. Marion knelt down by Stephen Walford's side, and undid the top button of his white coat.

"Get some brandy," she ordered. But the boy stirred not.

"If you please, Missisy, more better no brandy," he said with a twist of his leathery countenance which was meant for a leer. "I go just now call doctor come."

And, putting up his fan to protect his forehead, he walked out into the blazing sunlight.

* * * * * * *

But would the doctor never come? To Marion, sitting on the floor by Stephen Walford's side, wiping the cold perspiration from his forehead, and brushing off the mosquitoes from his face, the moments seemed hours. But at last came the distant sound of wheels, then the crunch on the gravel before the house-door. And with the noise outside the sick man's life came back to him for an instant. His mouth closed; he half raised himself on his elbow, and his heavy eyes lighted on the strange, awed face that now nearly touched his.

"Lilla!"

There was no mistaking the name. But the mere utterance of it was too great an effort, and his head sank back on Marion's arm just as the doctor and the boy came in.

What happened afterwards was always a jumble in Marion's mind. She knew that the doctor had taken her place, and had wanted her to leave the room; that then ice had been sent for, and finally the sick man lifted into the doctor's carriage, to be taken to his own home. Out of this scene one thing had impressed itself clearly on her vision,—a huge hole in the heel of his sock when his shoe fell off as they raised him up. And then the doctor, seeing Marion herself look pale and faint, had promised to come back and tell her when all was right, assuring her indeed that all was perfectly right just then! After the departure of the carriage Marion remembered being taken upstairs, and made to lie down, and to drink a glass of wine. But after the glass of wine nothing was clear till it was suddenly evening, and her brother and the doctor were talking close to her sofa.

"Slept all this afternoon? The best thing she could have done. That fellow Walford gave her an awful fright this morning. Frightened more people than one, too,—how that little girl of his did take on! You're pretty sure he doesn't liquor up too much, Lawson? In that case, he had better look out sharp,—for it was touch and go with him this morning."

"He can carry a good deal, I should say," Alick Lawson said thoughtfully. "But I think I should have noticed, or have heard, by now, if he was much given that way. But I'll keep a look-out. For the present you call it—to ladies—what, doctor?"

"A touch of the sun."

Marion turned her head.

"Awake, Miss Lawson, and feeling better? That's all right. Your patient is going on first-chop. A day or two in bed, and then he'll be about again."

The doctor went, and Alick Lawson, considering such to be his duty, sat down by his sister's side and started fidgetting.

"Alick, what did the doctor mean by saying Mr. Walford had frightened his little girl?" asked Marion in her most solemn voice. "Is he a married man? You never mentioned that he had any family."

Alick Lawson started up, kicking a luckless footstool to the other end of the room.

"Bless my soul, Marion, you must have been dreaming. Stephen Walford is not a marrying man. Married? I should think not. I'll go and get a smoke now. So long, my dear."

CHAPTER II.

"Mr. Walford have got!"

The door closed noiselessly behind the boy, and Stephen, still weak and pulled down in appearance, but enormous in height and breadth notwithstanding, stood looking hugely uncomfortable before his taipan's sister. Marion could note now what a good-natured, albeit clumsy-featured face it was, with its self-indulgent, somewhat sensual droop of the lips, thick without being coarse; and the unintellectual but honest and kindly blue eyes. On the other hand, Stephen Walford now saw for the first time clearly Marion Lawson, who even when arrayed for state occasions did not "handsome" much, and who now appeared still more at a disadvantage struggling with a tea-cup and a spoon which would not balance rightly on the saucer, a tangle of knitting on her lap, fully conscious that the hot weather did not suit her complexion.

But once free of the tea-cup, the tangle went on the floor, and Marion forgot her own self and sensations and, quickly walking towards her visitor, held out a most friendly, though much-devoured-by-mosquitoes hand, with the first kind words, so it seemed to Stephen, that he had heard for years from a fellow-countrywoman.

"I am so glad to see you, Mr. Walford. I have been so anxious about you."

"Gush" though this may have been, and ridiculous as it may have sounded, Marion Lawson was speaking nothing but the truth. A fortnight had passed since that Sunday when to her eyes—and to the eyes of others—Stephen Walford had been so very very near to the eternal darkness. A fortnight in which she had had plenty of time to dwell on the scene, plenty of opportunity to ask judicious questions about Stephen. For Alick Lawson had fallen ill with dysentery, and had been shipped to Chefoo at an hour's notice, and had scouted the doctor's suggestion that Marion should go with him as his nurse. So she had been left alone, and the young clerks she had invited to dine with her had told her in a measure why Walford was not a popular man. Of course they admired his splendid physique, hinted darkly that no amount of liquor could harm him, adding hastily that he was not a hard drinker, not by any means ; and envied his luck at poker. But decidedly, they agreed, he did not care for women, and he was too quarrelsome, and dangerous when he was angry, to be a favourite with men. An Ishmael in Shanghai, and not without reason. So ran the tradition, for none of the five had taken any steps towards cultivating Walford's acquaintance.

"Then, who has been looking after him, who is caring for him now?" Marion asked innocently.

"Oh, his Chinese housekeeper," the eldest answered hastily, and immediately changed the conversation.

His Chinese housekeeper! The meaning of the term only flashed upon Marion after her guests had gone ; but then it flashed vividly—so vividly that she felt shy at meeting those young clerks again, and so no longer invited them to come to see her, thus shutting herself off completely from the only society still remaining in Shanghai. How those young men must be laughing at her!—and Marion was very sensitive to ridicule.

This frame of mind lasted for three whole days of the fortnight. And then, with that perverse liking women so often

conceive for what is most unlovable, most undesirable, often most contemptible, the tide turned in favour of Stephen. He was an outcast from society; he was a lost sheep; he needed a helping hand. Let it not be imagined for one moment that Marion Lawson was right, that she had indeed any sound reason for imagining all this. That she did do so—that she constructed certain theories about a man generally voted disagreeable and impossible—only proves that she had nothing better to do, and that accordingly Satan was at hand to find her mischief.

And we all know that the old Enemy can clothe himself as an angel of light. It was quite in this garb that he appeared to Marion, and presented to her what she devoutly received as a mission from heaven—the reclamation of Stephen Walford. And it was in pursuance of this mission that she actually, upon hearing that Stephen was back in the office, sent a message asking him to come up and speak to her when his day's work was finished, and moreover received him in the manner and with the words afore-mentioned.

Ridiculously gushing she may have seemed, but his hostess's kindness suited Stephen in his then present mood. Those porcelain-blue, childishly bright eyes of his, that years of doing himself injustice had not been able to alter, now perchance a trifle sunken and weary with the late fight for life, looked wonderingly at the insignificant features and person of Miss Lawson. Nor did the sight repel. There was such a good soul looking out of those small greenish-grey eyes! Rather there rose up, in some obscure division of Stephen's brain, a dim vision of himself, a curly-headed sleepy boy, saying his Catechism, and being excused the Ten Commandments because it was too fine a day for lessons, by just such an one as this Miss Lawson, just such, down to the very pattern on her skirt! Who that someone had been—governess, aunt or cousin—Stephen did not stay to remember. He only felt—oh strange feeling!—that Marion was no stranger

to him; that she had been in his life before, had verily occupied a place in those far-off times which it still galled him somewhat to remember.

Where indeed had he seen her face before? And where was his shyness, his dislike of the ordinary woman, now? He was speaking to her, to shy, plain, self-conscious Marion Lawson, as he had not spoken for years. It was he who was putting her at her ease, he who was attending to her comfort. Truly it felt good to him to be there. And even that evening, in the midst of an uproarious and not over reputable gamble, when his new-returning strength collapsed all of a sudden, even in that place and at that hour the vision rose before him of an old-fashioned pattern on a skirt and of a little homely but sympathetic face above it. And with the vision there passed over him the faint breath of a dawning desire—to somewhere and somehow again spend an hour in the company he had kept that afternoon.

CHAPTER III.

Such a sensation for the in-streaming multitude from Chefoo and Japan! Who could say any longer that September in Shanghai was the month given up entirely to fever and the Cemetery? There was something far more exciting than temperatures and prickly heat to discuss this year.

And discussed it was, at every meeting of either sex—in the Club, on the tennis lawns, on the river, at night, and in confidential morning visits. And each discussion invariably ended with the same two phrases: "I tell you, she will." "I tell you, she won't."

There were for all Shanghai only one "he" and one "she"—Stephen Walford and Marion Lawson. Why everyone took such an interest in their concerns needs no explanation: it is ever thus where a possible match is concerned. But that something was, must be, going to happen was apparent to all eyes save those of the parties concerned, which (as is also ever thus) were holden to the last.

For Stephen Walford's hankering after that other, that old life, had not died out; and as Marion Lawson was to him the impersonation of it, to her he came, oftener and oftener as he found his own life, as chosen by himself, growing more and

more distasteful. Alick Lawson being away, too, made it so easy to slip upstairs to the cool shaded verandah about tea time, where Marion met him with a smile, and waited upon him as on an invalid to whom a relapse was more than possible. And what a contrast, to pass from such soothing, refining company to his own house, where some half-dozen shrill-voiced Cantonese beauties would be drinking tea, each one talking to overtop the others, amid dust, and disorder, and discomfort, the noise of children quarrelling, the loud laughter of his "housekeeper's" friends! What had been left for a man who had bound such a millstone round his neck, but to stay away from the racket and noise, to stay away playing billiards and gambling till the small hours of the night,—until he had met Marion Lawson?

But since he had met and known her, billiards and card-playing had lost their attraction for him, somehow or other. And, after two brief summer months, astonished sojourners at Chefoo returned to Shanghai to find Stephen Walford so far reclaimed as to be Miss Lawson's shadow by day, and in a fair way to be no longer the terror by night of his neighbourhood.

Not that he reformed suddenly, left off all his evil ways, or made any vows or promises binding himself for the future. All he did in the way of pulling himself up was done gradually. He no longer spent his nights in riotous living; he moved into new lodgings, strictly bachelor, and he gave his former landlord notice to quit. He sent his housekeeper and her two children on a visit to her home in Canton. There was no doubt in any masculine mind that Stephen Walford was contemplating matrimony.

And as for Marion: she was radiant with the joy of the sower who sees his seed whitening to harvest, with the pure absence of self-consciousness which may be the mark of the inferior intellect, but which is unattainable by the superior woman, in spite of her much labouring after simplicity. Theirs was such an honest,

almost schoolboy and schoolgirl friendship. Stephen enjoyed so thoroughly being entreated to be careful, being exhorted not to catch cold, in the fussy little way so charming to the man who has had no women friends, and whose only experience of the sex has been that of the master who has paid for all the attention he has received.

But the day of reckoning was not far off; and though Marion tried to make herself believe that she was really glad that her sisters and Alick would be back by the end of next week, just because they were her own people, she put off thinking of what was going to happen then till, say, to-morrow.

What lovely times—perchance all the lovelier for the lurking suspicion that their hours were numbered—Marion did have during those few weeks! Dinners on a houseboat moored off the jetty, with a good-natured matron to play chaperon, by the light of Chinese lanterns flickering in the wind; with the after-dinner silent hours on the little deck, the red glow of the pipes and cigars close at hand, and the gentle lap-lap of the black river against the sides; with the great mail steamers and smaller gunboats lying in the distance, their portholes all ablaze with light from stem to stern. To every one of us there is granted here on earth some moments when we are perfectly happy, though generally we only recognise the fact when the time has gone. I think those evenings, when she felt so much and said so little, were Marion Lawson's good moments in life.

And when the trouble she had so long dreaded came, and her family was back in Shanghai, Marion's fears proved to be ungrounded. Humiliating as the experience was at first, Marion could not help perceiving that her own concerns were not of great importance to her sisters. They laughed a little, in a peculiarly irritating fashion, at Marion taking up the *rôle* of reformer, and intimated that Stephen Walford's improvement was bound not to last. Still, it was Marion's own concern,

they agreed, and they were not going to put a spoke in her wheel. All men were objectionable in some way or other, and really, so long as he behaved as he did at present, no one could deny that Stephen Walford was a gentleman. Which conclusion arrived at, it was privately conveyed to Alick that he had better bring the whole concern to a head by giving Stephen a position in which he could marry. An agency in one of the outports would suit Stephen admirably—and it would rid them of Marion.

And Alick Lawson, who vastly preferred having his own house to himself, agreed.

* * * * * * *

Oh yes, Missisy have got,—and to Marion, lying back in a long chair in the idle hour that follows a Far Eastern tiffin, was ushered in the terror of all frivolous-minded women in Shanghai, the lady whose care for the souls of others was a scourge to her acquaintance, the one being whom no man in his sane senses would ever meet, if he could help it, whom no one could snub, of whom the most case-hardened were afraid, the wife of the meekest of missionaries, a Mrs. Wilson.

Even to look at, Mrs. Wilson was a formidable woman. Gaunt, tall and bony, she seemed to monopolise all space around her. The biggest drawing-rooms she literally filled with her presence; her voice had unlimited carrying power. A pronounced down on her upper lip, a slight cast in her eye, all added to the terrors of her person. And to-day she was come evidently on business bent.

"I heard something about you this morning, Miss Lawson, and as I have ten minutes to spare before going to my Working Party—which I regret to say you have neglected of late—I thought I would come and tell you what I heard. . . Ten

minutes by your clock, so I have no time to waste. Miss Lawson, I am told you are thinking of marrying Mr. Walford."

The start Marion gave, the rush of colour to her cheeks, the hot feeling round her eyes,—indignation alone was not responsible for these. Her "No" came out in such a faltering tone that Mrs. Wilson, bending forward and scanning her ruthlessly feature by feature, could scarcely catch it.

"Oh yes, you are," Marion's tormentor went on calmly. "That is to say, you will marry him if he asks you; and you are going to be asked."

Mrs. Wilson paused, not to allow Marion to reply, but simply to allow her own words to sink in. Then she resumed the attack.

"But I should be a very false friend to you, dear—and you know it is only because I am your friend that I have come to you (here a warm and somewhat damp glove was laid on Marion's arm)—if I didn't warn you that you must on no account marry this man."

Marion kept silence, and Mrs. Wilson again went on.

"Do you know what his past life has been? Because I know, and it is my bounden duty to tell you. To begin with, he is an Atheist——"

But Marion had now got beyond the limit of endurance. She actually stuck her fingers into her ears.

"I don't want to hear anything; I won't hear anything!" she cried. Marion was angry; but her anger was short-lived as the blaze of paper under a deal coal fire.

"Please don't tell me anything," she pleaded abjectly, laying an unwise finger or two on the damp glove, and thereby leaving one ear free.

"Poor child, poor child!" Mrs. Wilson sighed, taking forcible possession of the hand. "But you would rather know now than find it out afterwards, wouldn't you?"

Marion did not dare to utter the "no" which rose in her throat. So Mrs. Wilson had her way.

"In the sight of God, if not in that of man, is he not already a married man? Could you, dare you, do such a foul wrong as to make him cast off that girl, Chinese though she be, who has lived with him in the relationship of wife for so many years? Could you bear to have it on your conscience that you, you for your own selfish ends, have deprived his children of their father?"

It was all out; she had heard it all now, that mischief to which Marion had so diligently shut her eyes. This was the meaning, grim and uncompromising, of all the hints and sly allusions to which she had so persistently turned a deaf ear. Hideous before her arose a vision of what Stephen's home-life must be, or rather must have been, for surely it could scarcely be continuing now? Marion saw in that instant the "housekeeper" as she must be; she had seen the like, painted and tricked out in gaudy finery, driving with her mates, chattering noisily, along the Hyde Park of Shanghai, the Bubbling Well Road.

And the children too! Marion had seen them also, foul-tongued repulsive-looking little Eurasians, already marked out for vice, truly the scum of humanity.

But, was it not from this, even from this very thing, from this very life, that she had been struggling to raise Stephen Walford? Had she not really known, for weeks and weeks, almost everything that Mrs. Wilson was now telling her? Struggling for Stephen's soul, Heaven knew, with nothing but the purest motives? Why was he an Atheist? Because he felt God had forgotten him. Why did he live this life? Marion felt she knew why. From her own exceeding loneliness of spirit she guessed his; from her own intense craving for affection she divined his craving. Stephen was not clever; he had no special ambitions in life; he wanted nothing but tenderness. What

marvel then that he should have purchased it, since there was none who would give it to him?

Could it then be possible that her struggle for Stephen Walford's soul was a wrong? Sowed he undoubtedly had to his own sorrow and confusion; but was he bound to reap? Marion turned on her tormentor with a flash.

"Then you would have things continue as they are, Mrs. Wilson? You would let a man sink down to any depths, simply because in former years he has tied a millstone round his neck? Is there no salvation from our own selves; is there no way but to go down and down, right down to hell itself?"

"My dear"——Mrs. Wilson laid a reproving hand on Marion's other shoulder, "you quite misunderstand me. Far be it from me to leave any man to his fate, however merited. We are expressly told that sinners are to be called to repentance. But there are various ways of repentance, and no girl has the right to take it upon herself to be any man's saviour. No, my dear; duties never clash. You will not deny that it is Mr. Walford's duty to cleave to her who is now his wife in the sight of Heaven. Therefore, it is *not* your duty to be a consenting party to his forsaking her. Look upon the matter, dear Miss Lawson, in the light of the Gospel: What does it say about a man's losing his life, and thereby saving it? Losing it, you understand, in this world, to find it in the next. Will not a man call her blessed in heaven who, by helping him to do what is right, has saved his soul, even though in the saving of it he should lose the carnal pleasures of this life?"

Quite out of breath, Mrs. Wilson flung herself back in her chair. Marion fidgetted, but made no answer.

"My ten minutes are over. Dearest Miss Lawson, I leave you my deepest sympathy."

"I don't want your sympathy! I wish to Heaven you had never come, or been born!"

Marion stood up crimson and furious. But it was only after the door had closed upon Mrs. Wilson. Nor did her words, spoken loudly as they were, reach her visitor's ears.

CHAPTER IV.

"I am sending Walford to Hankow, to take up our agency there. It's an important post, but he's a good man, quite a good man. He asked me, by the way, if he might come in some time to-morrow to wish you good-bye."

Alick Lawson pushed back his chair from the dinner table, and strolled out into the verandah without looking at his sister.

Marion was tired. She had spent all the afternoon driving about paying calls, trying by much movement to forget that awful "ten minutes" with Mrs. Wilson. She had managed to tire her body sufficiently, but her brain seemed wider awake than usual. The reaction, the depression that follows great excitement, had come upon her, and it was now all she could do to keep herself from bursting into tears.

Stephen going; coming to say good-bye to her to-morrow! What would happen to him, left entirely to himself? Could he help sinking down, her convert Stephen, to his old depths in this new port? Would there be any woman there to keep him in the right path? Ah, but what was the right path? Not Mrs. Wilson's, surely not! And yet that misapplied verse rang in her ears, kept her wakeful in spite of her weariness,

clanged through her troubled dreams, and clashed out triumphantly with the morning gong—

"He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it."

* * * * * * *

"And will you take me, and make something out of me, Miss Lawson? You see, there's a chance of a new life for us both, in Hankow and away from Shanghai. You know what you have already done for me: that you have made me want to live your life; you have made life worth living. Of course I know you are far too good for me; but believe me, believe me, dear, for your sake—"

And Stephen Walford, utterly in earnest, heaved a sigh mighty enough to blow a couple of Japanese fans off the little bamboo table that separated him from Marion Lawson.

A little bamboo table only! If it had only been that! But what evil spirit has put it into the mind of man that second thoughts are best? Second thoughts had slowly but surely raised themselves up in Marion's brain—second thoughts rooted in old faiths and prejudices, in feminine dictums of morality, in feminine ignorance and bigotry, alas! and in hard-heartedness also—and now stood, an impassible barrier, between Marion and her lifelong happiness, between her saving hand and Stephen Walford's soul.

"I dare not say yes, Mr. Walford, though I so gladly would. Because, because—"

But here Marion completely broke down, and subsided into copious weeping.

"Don't cry, don't cry, please don't Miss Lawson. But do tell me you care for me."

Stephen Walford was by her side now, mortally distressed, absolutely incapacitated by a woman's tears. He stooped, and gently touched her on the shoulder. No result. He grew a little bolder, and passed his arm around her neck. And then there

flashed across her blurred vision such a trifle, such an absurd trifle! —a little native ring, with a couple of Chinese characters engraved on it.

That little native ring settled the matter. In that moment there quickened into life in Marion—oh marvel!—that strange demon Jealousy. Not that she recognised the new feeling, or called it by its right name; she rather cherished it as justifiable dignity.

"Don't you know why, Mr. Walford? Because you are not free; you have no right to ask me—"

Stephen Walford hastily withdrew his arm. His face expressed nothing but astonishment, the most complete mystification. Then, as Marion's tears continued, his countenance slowly lengthened, and he reddened, with something like shame, right up to the roots of his fair hair.

"Do you mean," he stammered out, "that I've led a life which you don't approve of? I know it, I know it; but I do assure you I've given it all up. Really, truly."

He had gone back to his own side of the table, and was resting his great hand upon it. Always that ring! always that ring! To Marion's distorted mental vision it took the form of a marriage ring, of an eternal link which she could not, must not, break.

"But you can't give *her* up," she said. "You can't throw *them* overboard."

Marion caught her breath. Stephen had muttered something not intended for her ears. A pause followed, but only a short one. Then Stephen spoke again, and quite calmly.

"Look here, Miss Lawson, I wouldn't have come to you if I hadn't been free. Do you think me altogether a brute? That—business you referred to is over and done with. You good women can't understand such affairs; and I'm not the one to explain them to you. Contracts of that kind are not binding on either side. Believe me, I am free; and not a soul on earth is wronged."

He stretched out his hand, that unfortunate hand, to grasp hers, to hold hers.

"*Two duties can never clash. The more than cruel wrong . . .*"

Why did they come back now, those words she had scorned and repudiated but yesterday? Why did she feel it was to-day so impossible to say "yes," when yesterday it had seemed so impossible to say "no"? Surely bigotry too has its martyrs.

From the gunboat in the river outside thundered the twelve o'clock gun, and the gong in a neighbouring *hong* took up the sound as it rolled away. And Marion looked up, her eyes full of tears and a maddening gnawing ache at her heart.

"I can't, Stephen. Don't ask me to."

"I won't."

And Stephen got calmly, quite calmly, out of his chair, and walked straight out of the room, never looking at her again. He was far down the road before Marion quite realised he was gone.

PART II.

HIS HANDMAID.

CHAPTER I.

Ninety-nine out of every hundred men of his acquaintance would have voted Stephen Walford right when he told Marion that contracts between European masters and Oriental handmaidens were not binding on either side. For those ninety-nine look upon the relationship as, on the woman's side, a purely sordid one. The girl, they argue, performs her part of the contract for the sake of those substantial silver loaves and fishes which will not fail to win her the esteem and admiration of her fellow-countrywomen. If her employer shows signs of bankruptcy, she will instantly desert him. Should he take to himself a wife of his own kindred—his handmaiden has her price; and this once paid, she molests him not. From all which the conclusion to be drawn is, that the contract having been a purely business one, the Mrs. Wilsons who condemn a man as breaking his handmaiden's heart by deserting her——simply don't know what they are talking about.

But the ninety-and-nine wise men are not always right. Now and then there is to be found a Chinese woman whose whole life and being is so bound up in her master's that existence to her without him is an impossibility. Perhaps the sentiment she is

capable of is not exalted enough to be called devotion, but in many respects it greatly resembles that quality.

And such was the particular girl known as Mémé, who joined Stephen Walford at Hankow a couple of months after he had parted from Marion Lawson.

A couple of months of such utter misery, of such forlornness, such loneliness! Marion had only too effectually swept Stephen's heart clean of the evil spirit. Now there was plenty of room for the seven devils, when she had failed him so lamentably at the last. It never entered his head that Marion might change her mind—had probably already done so. She had refused him, and that refusal meant to Stephen Walford finality. The society of European women in Hankow he would not enter: were they not all alike, selfish and faithless? He did not even care to try them, and so refused to call on them. The big hong, which in his predecessor's days had been noted for its gaiety, now stood sombre and silent. In the great dining-room, large enough to hold half the community, Stephen Walford ate his solitary meals, his solemn "boy" standing close behind watching every mouthful, and ready to snatch away his plate almost before he had finished. The bachelors of Hankow would gladly have joined him, but something—perhaps that old touch of the sun—was making Stephen morose and forbidding. Had he not had a glimpse into a possible Eden? and then, just when he had been about to enter it, had not the gate been slammed in his face? What could his portion be henceforth, except thorns and briers? You see, Stephen Walford had never been in love before, and he was one of those rare men who love but once. And since he was no longer in his first youth, and so was very badly hit, he cast about for some means of oblivion, and found it in Mémé, and in drink.

Mémé was not his original Shanghai housekeeper. She had quite disappeared, in accordance with universal custom, as expounded by the ninety-and-nine; and all that remained of

Stephen's old life was the half-yearly bill from the Eurasian school in Hongkong. Mémé was quite young, even as China girls go, and she was not painted, nor loud-voiced, nor assertive. She came into Stephen's household at Hankow one day to do some mending, and she simply stayed there. Stephen scarcely seemed to notice her presence at first. Then, when she did not appear to wait upon him for at least four meals, he angrily asked the boy what had become of her. From that day forth Stephen's solitude was a solitude *à deux*.

Looked upon as a tonic, or a stimulant, or even as a thorn in the flesh (as the orthodox wife usually is) Mémé was distinctly a failure. She ministered solely to the lower side of Stephen's nature, and soothed that higher side, which Marion Lawson had awakened into such pain-bringing life, back again to sleep. When Stephen came back to dinner tired, or troubled in mind, Mémé suggested, and then prepared in the most tempting manner, a "pick-me-up." Hankow is very hot in summer, far, far hotter than Shanghai, and Stephen was big, and felt the heat badly. And when he could not eat, which was now every morning, Mémé made him drink. She had completely grasped the idea that the way to Stephen's heart (or his purse) lay through his mouth. Under Mémé's sway Stephen Walford began to degenerate again; and the last state of such a man was bound to be worse than the first.

Undoubtedly there must have been some hereditary taint in Stephen, since he resisted so feebly the temptation to drink, and thus to remember his misery no more. But when a man who has lived ten years in China without imbibing to excess suddenly takes to drink, there is usually, one might almost say always, a woman in the case. In Stephen's case Marion Lawson was the cause and Mémé the effect.

Stephen's downfall was a fairly rapid one, but being a strong man it was some time before he so far forgot himself as to let the outside world know what he was doing. It was only on Alick

Lawson's second visit to Hankow, some eight months after Mémé's appearance, that matters came to a head, and Stephen received a warning most kindly meant,—for Alick Lawson was a merciful man, and the constant society of his sister Marion had convinced him that Stephen had been badly used. But by this time Stephen Walford was beginning to lose his self-control, and he took the warning so badly that it became quite evident to Alick that dismissal was only a question of weeks.

As a matter of fact, Alick Lawson's warning had startled Stephen a little. So, on his way upstairs to his own rooms, he seriously contemplated amendment, and as a beginning called Mémé and scolded her roundly. Mémé listened quietly, without answering or justifying herself—and then brought him his usual cocktail.

Now Stephen positively swore at her, making himself very hot and tired by so doing. And then,—why he tossed off the cocktail, and told her never to bring him any more. Which order Mémé naturally did not obey.

In another two months Stephen Walford had lost his billet, and left Hankow for the south. For, being reckoned a smart man of business he had little difficulty in getting another situation, this time in Canton, and in a hong whose *taipan* was reckoned far more easy-going than Alick Lawson. Here matters began fairly well. For one thing, Mémé had got rather frightened at the final rumpus in Hankow, and was now, if not decreasing, at least not increasing his potions. There actually seemed to be dawning a time of comparative comfort for the two, when Mémé suddenly fell ill.

Grievously ill, with a sickness the outcome of which must be either death or disfigurement, Mémé lay, deserted by all her acquaintances, even by Stephen's servants. But this sickness did not crush Stephen, it rather roused all the man in him. He tended her alone, carefully, lovingly, and brought her back, by the sheer strength of his will, into the land of the living. It was only

when Mémé, her beauty gone for ever, was pronounced safe, that Stephen Walford awoke to the fact that he had ruined himself a second time, and for a China girl. He had lost his new situation, and with it those few friends he had made in Canton, those friends whose advice, to send Mémé home (wherever that "home" might be) he had indignantly spurned.

Stephen Walford took his second step down the social ladder. No hong would employ him now; yet he could not starve. The half-yearly bill from the Eurasian school must be paid too, for Stephen had still enough self-respect left to wish to give his children something of a chance in life. So he became a tide-waiter in the Customs, and was sent back to Shanghai to drudge about wharves, on merchant-steamers, and amidst cargo, as the very lowest of the "outdoor" staff.

It was a relief to Stephen Walford to be so very low down in the Shanghai world. There was no chance of meeting his old companions, far less of seeing Marion Lawson. So great a gulf was now fixed between his past and his present that it was not even necessary to change his name. And moreover, with his change in life, a great many of his old expenses had fallen away. He had far more money to spend—so it seemed at least. And none of it need be spent on Mémé—no more handsome pieces of jewellery, no more rolls of silks and satins, no more picnics and excursions to tea-houses—now that she was ugly, and now that, since her illness, the relationship between them had so totally changed, and Stephen had become the master of one no longer the mistress. Mémé had become his scapegoat, his "whipping-boy," so to speak, ever since he had nursed her back to life. Remember, it was Mémé herself who had blunted Stephen's moral sense in the first instance, and who went on blunting it still. Was Stephen morose, ill-pleased, churlish? Mémé had only one remedy—drink. He got abusive, ungenerous, cruel,—still she plied him with drink. Then he beat her and ill-used her, for days together even deserted her. For he

knew she would bear everything, and come after him and forgive him all, and comfort him as well—with drink.

They were merciful to him in the Customs, and gave him more than one chance. And Stephen too had his own little struggles upwards, struggles in which Mémé helped him valiantly so long as he did not require any help, but failed him lamentably just when she ought to have been strong. She was so afraid, poor girl, of losing him altogether if he got up again, that she was even glad each time he fell; for the deeper the depth the surer she felt of him.

It was just about the time that Stephen Walford was turned out of the Customs as a hopeless drunkard that the grand marriage of the season took place in Shanghai, and Alick Lawson brought his bride to the hong to reign in place of his sister Marion, who had found her vocation as head of the Eurasian school for girls in the Model Settlement.

CHAPTER II.

When Stephen Walford was turned out of the Customs he had changed so completely in outward appearance that it would have puzzled his own mother to recognise him.

But an even greater change had taken place in him morally and mentally. He had completely lost that sense of self-respect which, although rudely shaken by Marion Lawson, had still stood him in good stead in the Canton days of Mémé's illness.

Stephen was poor now, a mere beggar, and Mémé was rich, —rich, that is to say, for a Chinese woman, who (in the servant class) can support life very comfortably on about a shilling a week. Mémé's riches, of course, were of Stephen Walford's giving, to a great extent. If he argued the matter at all with himself, he must undoubtedly have fallen back on this fact for his own justification. It is to be supposed he did so. This one thing is certain, that after he was "sacked" by his long-suffering Chief, and when his two children had been sent back to him after a year's failure to pay for them, Stephen Walford did not even seek for any employment, but lived on Mémé till her savings were exhausted, and then, with shame be it said, sent her forth to make, if it were possible, more for him to spend.

And Mémé went forth, and failed. She had grown older and uglier, and she had lost some front teeth on one evening in

particular, in a manner about which Stephen was not clear, but in which he and a poker had been concerned. But in spite of this, in spite of everything, the two clung to each other. In Mémé it was, I suppose, the doglike instinct of the half-developed, wholly uneducated animal; in Stephen it grew to be mere habit. He had become so accustomed to Mémé that he could not have done without her, were it only to beat her, to swear at her, or to see her—not cry, Mémé never cried—laugh hysterically as she picked herself up after being knocked down.

And Stephen's children? They too treated Mémé as their drudge, with all the savage malevolence which half-castes, feeling themselves despised and outcasts, love to vent on one still more unfortunate than they are. Mémé hated them in return, with a murderous hatred, when they joined their father in abusing her, and endured pangs of hopeless jealousy when Stephen fondled them in a maudlin way. And so matters went on, growing worse day by day, till the cold weather came round, and there was nothing to eat nor to drink in the house.

It was on a bitterly cold day in January, when the north wind, blowing straight from Siberia and the Arctic regions, numbs the life even of the warmest clad, that Marion Lawson, hard at work over accounts, and constantly interrupted by demands from teachers or children, received an unexpected visit from her brother Alick.

Naturally, the two did not see much of each other now. Alick's wife was a leader of Shanghai society, and her husband was swept along in her train. While Marion, away in her school in the French Concession, with the great Convent almost next door, had drifted into other friendships and other ways of thinking. They called her Sister Marion now, and the French priests and nuns had great hopes of her. Moreover, if not exactly happy, Marion was becoming quite contented. Plenty of work, no time for brooding, the sound sleep of bodily fatigue at night—all these

things were gradually healing over the old sores and making out of Marion Lawson the sentimental and morbid a stout, cheery-faced, almost good-looking woman.

Just the sort of woman for this place, Alick Lawson decided, as he stood over the fire warming his hands. And . . . just the sort he wanted for his business that morning, if he were only sure she had quite forgotten and put out of her mind certain things . . .

Well, even if she hadn't, Marion was the only person in the wide world to whom he could turn for help. And though a shrewd man of the world, bold where business was concerned, and ready to stand up for his rights, still, when it came to charity, to doing good on the sly, Alick Lawson felt himself a coward, and ready to shelter himself behind any woman's petticoat.

Should he tell her? Alick revolved the question in his mind while Marion cleared the room of intruders, shoved the accounts inside the slope of a writing-table, and poked up the fire. But his courage failed him, failed him even when he had got her out into his brougham, even when she remarked on the unwieldy hamper under the driver's seat, even when the carriage stopped at a house, or rather shanty, in the very lowest slums of the Model Settlement. He told himself that he was waiting for her to ask him some question, that she must be a woman entirely without curiosity, without imagination, to go with him so quietly, without a "why?" or a "wherefore?" No, she had asked no questions, made no objections, had only quietly come with him. It was not natural, it was almost inhuman!

The brougham stopped. And Alick Lawson handed his sister out. It was only then that he noticed that her hand was trembling. But it was too late to turn back now, too late to speak. Alick Lawson opened the door of the miserable shanty and pushed his sister inside.

The place seemed empty at first. Through the chinks in the wooden walls the wind came howling. The windows, mostly broken, were stuffed with rags, shutting out the little daylight that might have lighted up the room. But, as her eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, Marion could see, huddled together over a dead fire, two children, who gazed vacantly at them.

"Starving!"

Marion knew it before Alick whispered it to her. Then, as he opened the door to fetch in the hamper, the light shone suddenly upon a bed in the corner, a bed on which someone was lying, asleep or dead.

Marion walked across the room and looked down on the face of the sleeper.

A big man, with tumbled yellow hair, clad only in an old flannel coat and trousers. Through the buttoned-up coat Marion caught glimpses of a bare chest—a chest once powerful, now sunken into hollows. The eyes were closed, and the cheeks hung down in bags. And the mouth! cracked and blistered as by fever. A man no longer a man, but a mass of bloated flesh and shrunken muscle, not dead, but asleep, insensible to cold, nakedness and misery, a damned soul.

But as Marion bent over him, a cry of joy from the children, who had fallen upon Alick Lawson's hamper, aroused the sleeper. He opened his dulled eyes, stared stupidly at the face bending over him, and then uttered one single word—

"Lilla!"

Again it was a hot summer's day, and again he was a child being excused his Catechism. Again it was another hot day, and a homely, kindly face was bending over him, fanning him, laying ice on his head. He could feel the ice now, but it was too cold, far too cold. It made him shiver, it was freezing him, it was creeping all over him; he was sinking, falling. That face, with the hateful pity on it, would it not go away? That

icicle, would it not stop dripping down his back? It was coming nearer and nearer, that mountain of ice, it was falling on him, was crushing him.

"Mémé! Mémé! save me! Take her away!"

With Stephen Walford's shriek of delirium something stirred in another corner. A Chinese woman, hideously scarred with small-pox, rushed forward and, thrusting Marion to one side, bent over the sufferer. And he clung to her, while she comforted and soothed him, and he buried his face on her shoulder. . . . .

"Marion, will you take the children away with you?"

Marion started. Who was speaking to her, and where was she? What children? Whose? Had Alick Lawson not seen, not heard; or hearing, did he not understand?

Then she heard herself saying, in her quiet, most ordinary voice—

"Poor children! Certainly, if their father agrees."

* * * * * * *

"Decidedly, she can't have recognised him. No woman could have taken matters as she did if she had. Unless—she is utterly heartless. But she isn't. It certainly takes a woman to forget."

So Alick Lawson mused to himself as he drove Marion back to her school.

And Marion, sitting beside him, was digging her nails deep into her flesh to keep herself from sinking right, right away into blessed unconsciousness.

CHAPTER III.

Stephen Walford's life could only end in one way, and that end was not far off. He scarcely noticed when the children went, and was barely conscious of a fire rekindled on the once cold hearth. He was too far gone even to swear at Mémé.

He was barely thirty-five when Soapy Sandy Shaw, coming in with a great piece of news, found him on his deathbed. Not in the act of dying; but clearly Stephen Walford would never rise again.

Soapy Sandy was one of Stephen's only remaining friends. Once he had been a purser on a big ocean liner, now he was the keeper of a low grog-shop in this most disreputable quarter of Shanghai. It was at his bar and of his abominable liquor that Stephen Walford, once the trusted agent of Lawson and Company, once the pride of his mother and the admired of his acquaintances, had drunk, and drunk, and drunk, so long as he had a cent of his own or of Mémé's to spend. And afterwards,—Soapy Sandy had just turned him out of doors. What brought him here now?

It leaked out, Sandy's errand, before long. A certain ticket, taken in the name of Stephen Walford, had won a thousand dollars in a monthly lottery. A thousand dollars there were, waiting for Stephen to take up, if indeed they belonged to him.

But did they? Sandy began to doubt this when he saw the utter blankness of Stephen's face as he gradually broached the subject.

"Mémé!"

She came directly at her master's call.

"Did you take a ticket in the lottery this month?"

Every Chinaman, and every Chinawoman, is a born gambler. But you cannot buy lottery tickets if you have no money to pay for them, and, so far as Stephen knew, Mémé had none.

"No savvey."

"Where did you get the money?"

Mémé looked doubtfully at Soapy Sandy, who laughed and got up, saying he would come back presently.

"Shall I get your money for you, Walford?" he asked, as he settled his hat on his head. "They might make a fuss about handing over so much money to Mémé. Where's the ticket, my girl?"

"No savvey," Mémé answered sulkily.

"Give him the ticket, Mémé," Stephen said wearily. "I can't let you go out; I must have you at hand. Bring the dollars along this evening, Sandy. I'm going to sleep now."

From an innermost pocket Mémé produced the ticket, and handed it to Stephen. It fell from his hand, and Soapy Sandy snatched it up with a laugh.

"Can't you trust me, Mémé?" he asked in a tone that was meant to be jocular.

"No savvey," was Mémé's reply, as she turned abruptly away.

* * * * * * *

It was late in the evening when Soapy Sandy came back with a pile of dirty ten-dollar notes. Stephen Walford was sitting up in bed. He had even made an effort to get on a

dressing-gown, a brand-new wadded gown, so it seemed, for it lay in a crushed up bundle close to the bed. Mémé was nowhere to be seen.

"That money is hers, Sandy," Stephen said in a hoarse whisper. "I've told her to put it into the Bank at once. It's of no use to me, you see, and I don't want her to give it to me. Why, she pawned her ear-rings to buy that ticket. And she took it in my name, to bring good luck. I'd like to think it would bring her good luck in the long run. But you mustn't waste it, Mémé, poor Mémé!"

The last words were spoken to Mémé herself, who had come quietly in at the door.

"Shall I take care of the notes for you for the present, Mémé?" said Soapy Sandy with what he meant for a winning smile.

"No savvey," Mémé answered sullenly. "I can keep the dollars all right."

"There might be some difficulty about your children, Walford," Sandy went on, appealing to the sick man, but keeping the notes still tightly in his hand. "Surely you don't mean to leave them penniless, and this girl well off? Haven't you any fatherly feelings at all? Better make a will, and say what you want to have done with your property!"

"I have no property, and the children will be looked after better where they are," said Stephen faintly. "I wouldn't trust them with Mémé; she's got too long a score against them. And my own home people gave me up long ago. I don't want anybody to get hold of that money which Mémé was fool enough to put my name to. Get me paper and ink, Sandy—there's some in the next room—and I'll make a will. And you can witness it. Mémé, girl, shake up my pillow. No, don't put on that cursed dressing-gown: what business had *she* to send it? Take the lamp, Sandy. Can't you find any paper? Oh!"

"Good God, Mémé, what is it?"

For as Sandy, mechanically grasping the notes, was vainly searching for pen, ink and paper, in the adjoining room, he heard a terrified cry from Mémé. Stephen Walford had fallen back on the pillow, his eyes had turned up, he was breathing stertorously. He would never hold a pen again.

* * * * * * *

That night, as he lay awake in bed, the devil entered into Soapy Sandy, and made him plan a deed, the doing of which was the foulest act of his already foul enough life.

He was sorely in need of those thousand dollars, of those notes which had found their way back into his pocket while Mémé was hanging over Stephen's deathbed. Possession is after all nine-tenths of the law,—if there was indeed any such thing as law to be considered in connection with Mémé. Not that Soapy Sandy made up his mind to cheat Mémé out of her money altogether. Only, he would be her bank, and pay her the interest, while he invested the principal for her. In a first-class investment too, his own grog-shop! He might even take on Mémé as a kind of partner in the concern, or, better still, offer her a situation as housekeeper to himself. A capital idea, this last! Why, all the advantages were on Mémé's side: a secured income (for he would pay her regularly); protection from importunate poor relations, such as every Chinese possesses in swarms; no possible exaction from Stephen's children; a good home, good food and very light work. Soapy Sandy fell asleep persuaded he was Mémé's benefactor, and arose to go round to Stephen Walford's house after breakfast, at peace with himself.

The officials from the British Consulate were there before him. They were taking a look round the outer room when Sandy Shaw walked in.

"Mr Shaw, as a friend of the deceased, do you know if he left any money?"

Soapy Sandy slowly shook his head.

"He won a thousand dollars a few days ago in a lottery," insinuated a subordinate functionary. "Where are they?"

There was a Chinese girl with him to the last," Sandy said hurriedly. "Walford told me the money belonged to her. Probably he made her a present of it."

"Ah, indeed. Call the woman, and we will question her."

Mémé was within, jealously watching the coffin which had been brought only to be taken away. Barely twelve hours had elapsed, and she had scarcely had time to realise what had happened to her,—if indeed she was ever to realise it at all.

Brought before her judges, Mémé was dumb, to Sandy's great relief. She had no answer, to be more accurate, but "No savvey"; and the officials, perhaps secretly relieved at having no estate to administer, soon dismissed her. Then they went away themselves. Mémé heard their footsteps dying away in the distance; heard them laugh too, when they imagined they had put a respectful distance between themselves and the dead man. And then, looking up, she saw Soapy Sandy standing in the doorway.

"Mémé," he said, "come out here."

Mémé obeyed.

"Your master," he began, nervously shifting his feet and stammering a little, "left me all his money. He knew I would be a good friend to you, and not see you want. But you must understand that he wanted me to take care of the dollars for you. Do you understand?"

Mémé had her answer ready. It was the old and convenient "No savvey."

"But you *must* savvey," Sandy went on in a tone of vexation. "I will give you dollars when you want them, Mémé—two, five, ten at a time. But they are *my* dollars, do you see? And *I* give them to you. Your master has left you nothing, do you understand?"

She had driven him to this, he told himself afterwards. She was so stupid! He had been obliged to put the matter in this way. Otherwise she would have made his life unbearable by constantly coming to him for money,—as she undoubtedly would have done if she had thought she had any right to do so.

"Your master asked me to look after you, Mémé," he continued in a soothing voice. "You were a good girl to him, and I don't mean you to starve. Come and live in my house; come and look after me. There's plenty of *chow-chow* there, and plenty of people to talk to. And I'll give you *cumshaws* too, and you shall have rides in a carriage, and go to the theatre, and——"

Sandy paused, out of breath, and feeling strangely hot all over. Mémé's eyes were fixed on him with an expression he did not quite like.

"My master have give you all?" she asked quietly.

"Yes," he said awkwardly. "But you needn't mind about that. I can give you money. As a present from myself, you understand. Do you want any now?"

He took a greasy pocket-book out of his pocket and fumbled about the shabby elastic. He was feeling mightily uncomfortable; and yet Mémé was not watching him any more. She had turned her back, and was gazing at the open coffin in the dingy room behind.

"Ten dollars and thirty *cash*."

Soapy Sandy's mouth half opened to say "Only that?" But he quickly shut it, and brought out instead——

"What do you want with so much all at once? Isn't five dollars enough for to-day, Mémé? Come, I'll give you five dollars now and five dollars next month, and after that——"

He stopped short, and absolutely quailed. Quailed beneath the eyes of an ugly pauper Chinese woman too! Scorn was

written in Mémé's slanting eyes, and Sandy Shaw, the Caucasian, felt himself a mean man, hideously, sordidly low and vile.

"My no wanchey this month, next month," said Mémé slowly. "Ten dollars, thirty cash, no more."

Soapy Sandy had sunk too low even to respect himself.

"No more, then, Mémé," he said, with a feeble attempt at playfulness. And he counted the money into her hand.

Mémé pocketed the dollars hurriedly, as though she was afraid that he would take back his gift. Then she turned from him to go into the inner room.

"When will you come to my house, Mémé?" Sandy asked, catching at her sleeve in passing. "I am coming to the funeral this afternoon, and when they take away the coffin you may as well come along to my place. Answer, my girl, will you? Do you understand me? You can live in my house, and take care of me, and I will take care of you. Can do?" he wound up, in a coaxing tone.

Then Mémé at last gave him a straight answer.

"Suppose to-morrow you wanchey my, I can come into your house."

Soapy Sandy Shaw went away satisfied.

"I've done the right thing by her," he quieted himself with. "There's not a man in Shanghai who would have done so much for a fellow's cast-off girl."

Sandy had already quite forgotten how he had come by the thousand dollars.

* * * * * * *

"There are two coffins in the room, Shaw," said the constable who had come to see Stephen Walford carried to his burying. "Doctor, you didn't tell me there were two of them dead. Who is in the second coffin?"

"Two coffins, man? Why, you must be seeing double," answered the doctor. "Look in, Shaw, and stop that hubbub. You ought not to have let the Chinese into that room, constable. What an indecent row!"

But Soapy Sandy was leaning against the wall, his eyes staring wildly, unable to move or to speak.

"Good God, man, what ails *you* now?"

For answer Sandy pointed, with an expression of terror, to a corner of the room where the crowd of jabbering, gesticulating Chinese women was thickest.

The doctor pushed his way through the women and looked into the coffin which lay open before him.

The occupant was no Englishman. He, Stephen Walford, lay quietly at rest in that other coffin,—for there *were* two in the room. In this one lay, peacefully smiling in that sleep which knows no ill dreams, no bitter awakening, Mémé. She was dressed in one of those gaudy silk coats that are the delight of the Chinese woman. On her arms were the bangles that had been Stephen's first gift, and in her hand, tightly clasped, was a strip of Chinese paper.

"Dead, quite dead!" the doctor pronounced after he had carefully examined her. "What can she have died of? I should like to have a post-mortem, only——" He looked inquiringly at the constable.

"Not safe, sir; in fact, impossible," said that worthy sententiously. "The natives would mob us. I had some trouble in getting Miss Lawson safely away just now. She came with a wreath, from his children, I suppose, and these *amahs* set upon her, and would have hurt her badly if I hadn't turned up. Something has gone wrong here, and the sooner we get out of this the better, Shaw! Where's the man gone? Bolted, I declare!"

"What's that paper in her hand?" asked the doctor. "That may tell us something. Question that old lady who is making the most row, constable, while I take a look at the document."

Only too proud to show off his knowledge of the colloquial, the constable engaged in a voluble discourse with the old lady in question, while the doctor bent over the coffin and gently drew the paper from the dead woman's hand.

On it was written, in Chinese, Mémé's bill for her last journey!

Coffin— Ten Dollars.
Opium—Thirty Cash.

No. 8.

A-KUEI

A CHINA COAST TALE

BY

LISE BOEHM.

A-KUEI.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

"MASTER, wanchey boy?"

The old coolie stood in the doorway, nervously drumming on the door with one hand. The Consul, H.B.M's Consul at Ssŭ-ming, a burly man, in the China coast equivalent for shirt-sleeves, was sitting at his writing-table struggling with the heat of a July day and a Trade Report.

"Eh?"

The "eh" was as near irritation as was possible in the Consul. He was a man cursed with too good a temper ever to get on in the Service, ever to save money, ever to resist an interruption. All the servants knew this, and traded upon it accordingly.

"Wanchey boy?" repeated the coolie.

"Talkey missisy," was the reply; and the Consul dipped his pen in the ink again and continued: Re-exports have fallen, value Haikwan taels—"

"Have talkey missisy," the coolie persisted. "Missisy have talkey, Talkey Master."

The Consul flung down his pen in despair, and faced the inevitable.

"All right, coolie. Catchey boy come this side."

"Boy this side have got," replied the coolie in triumph. And stepping slightly to one side he disclosed an urchin of some twelve years of age, with a round jolly little face, eyes after the fashion of a Japanese doll, hair braided into a very long and suspiciously thin pigtail,—a small, slender urchin, dressed in a blue cotton coat made with plenty of room to grow, his baggy trousers carefully tied at the ankles, and his small feet perfectly lost to view in a pair of enormous Chinese shoes of black cloth with thick white soles.

"Good afternoon, sir," said the urchin composedly. The old coolie melted into the background, and the youngster moved a few steps nearer.

"I hear you want a boy," he went on in pure Saxon. "I can do boy-pidgin, if God wills you take me."

"Ho, ho!" laughed the Consul. "So you talk English, do you? And, 'if God wills!' Are you from the Mission School, then? Because if you are,——I don't think you are quite old enough for my pidgin!"

He had an unguarded tongue, this fat Consul. That was part of his good nature, and part of the reason why, after twenty-four years' service in the most out-of-the-way places, he was still in Ssŭ-ming, a port which, having no trade, exacts only a halfpenny Trade Report.

"Pardon excuse, sir," answered the boy. "My father is a Christian, a preacher. I am not, if you like it so fashion."

"Upon my word, I don't understand you, boy. Your English is too good for me!"

A self-satisfied smile glimmered for a moment in the urchin's eye.

"See, Master, it is this way. My father is Christian preacher, —very good. I go to American Mission School. There I learn to read and write the English. But my father has one mother and three brothers. Supposing by and by my father's mother die, my father is a Christian; he can't put Joss-paper and all Chinese customs on my father's mother's grave. But if he does not put the Joss-paper on the grave, my father can't take my father's mother's fields. He loses the fields, you can see. You Consul knows all Chinese fashions. You write English books for Chinese customs?"

The Consul nodded assent. Once he had committed the enormity of publishing a pamphlet, printed at his own expense, on a certain trip to the Great Wall. Sweet is fame, even from the mouth of a China boy of twelve. The urchin had scored a point.

"My father is Christian,—that is his business. But I don't want his business. If you like me, I can come for your boy. Suppose by and by my father's mother dies, I can make Chinese customs for my father, and then my father can take my father's mother's fields. Master understands?"

"Oh yes," the Consul answered with a twinkle in his eye. "Your father is a wise man, I see. He is to keep in with the missionaries, and score as a Chinaman as well. Very neat, upon my word! But, boy, what would the missionaries say if I told them what you have just told me?"

The urchin hesitated,—a stage hesitation.

"Master wants to laugh, I know. Master knows the Chinese customs very well. This American missionary, he doesn't know anything. Master knows, Chinese never tell to spoil business. I tell Master true. Not necessary for Master to tell American missionary. The American missionary doesn't like English Consul!"

This was notoriously true. There were no dealings between the British Consul and the American Mission in Ssŭ-ming. He

would not be believed ; nay, more, an outcry would be raised against him for slander did he report that one of their converts was playing double, and making his son perform the rites of ancestral worship in order to secure the family property. No ; the youngster was right, but he was far too enlightened to make a comfortable inmate of the Consular compound. The Consul cast about in his mind for a way to rid himself of the applicant.

"You are too small for my pidgin," he said. "How could you carry a heavy dish to the table?"

"I shall grow," was the prompt response. "And your coolie, he will learn me."

The old coolie grunted assent from the background.

"But I would not give you more than five dollars a month."

"All right. Five dollars at first. By and by, if you like me, you can give me more. If you do not want me, I by and by can go home. Only, if you please to try me."

The Consul was mortally afraid of hurting the feelings of a fly. He fidgetted in his chair, and made no answer. The urchin stood motionless, his hands folded in a submissive way, his eyes fixed entreatingly on the Consul's face. The Consul felt the entreaty of those eyes even through the huge handkerchief with which he kept on mopping his streaming forehead.

Then a side door opened, and there fluttered in a bundle of nerves clothed in a thin and frail little body. The Consul's wife was a Russian of the most neurotic, hysterical type,—and, of course, his exact opposite in every way.

"Ah, can I not get some tea to-day? Why do you stand there, boy? Go and bring me some at once."

The urchin needed no further instruction. He was out of the room and back again with the tea-tray as though by magic.

And thus, without further parley, A-kuei was installed as "boy" at the British Consulate, Ssŭ-ming.

CHAPTER II.

"Mother, won't you teach A-kuei to read along with me?"

Jeanne Norris stretched herself lazily and yawned noisily. It was lesson time, the hour of tears and of slaps with the slipper, —the hour when Jeanne hated her mother, and told her so, and when the good-natured Consul fled to his office to escape the passionate appeals for justice and for mercy from his wife and his child.

"Teach A-kuei? How silly you are, Jeanne! *I* to teach a dirty little China boy? Naughty Jeanne! Have I not told you not to talk to A-kuei? Have you been talking Chinese, and eating the servants' horrible *chow-chow*? I am sure I can smell pickled cabbage! And I told you not to go into the back-yard. Naughty girl! I shall slap you hard for that cabbage!"

"I haven't eaten any cabbage," Jeanne answered sulkily. "And I don't talk Chinese with A-kuei. He always wants to talk English. And I only peeped at his bird; I didn't go into the yard. Father! Father!"

For Mrs. Norris's slipper had come down with unwonted force on Jeanne's bare arm. And the Consul's footsteps sounded coming nearer and nearer to the house.

"Oh Jeanne, my darling, do say you are not hurt!" cried Mrs. Norris in alarm as Jeanne flopped down sobbing on the floor. Jeanne had not lived seven years in the world without learning how to flop, in a boneless fashion, when it suited her purpose. And her purpose was always a definite one—to get her own way. On this occasion the getting her own way meant the getting of something too delicious, of something far surpassing her wildest dreams. That morning, when the amah was out of sight, Jeanne had crept into the yard, and seeing the door of A-kuei's room half open had peeped in. A-kuei had always something lovely in his room—something Chinese which he had found, or bought, or had given to him! Lovely sticky slabs of Chinese sweetmeats, ground-nuts—forbidden by Mrs. Norris—or cuts of luscious water-melon, which by some mysterious good luck had never even given Jeanne a passing twinge, cholera laden though Europeans reckon it to be. But this morning it was not forbidden fruit that held Jeanne entranced at A-kuei's door. It was something far, far better, something she had never seen there before—a bird in a rough wicker cage.

There the cage hung, far too small of course, and in it was the bird, a real live mynah. It squatted in the bottom of the cage, eating its rice and sipping its tea, just like any Chinaman. Jeanne caught her breath with excitement. Her mother could not endure pets, and Jeanne herself had a secret inborn fear of dogs and cats. But this bird! How it cocked its head and hopped about; how it splashed the tea about; and how it threw back its head when it was swallowing some drops!

"By and by that bird will talk, Jeanne," a voice said behind her. Jeanne started guiltily. She was not quite sure of A-kuei yet. He might be a "tell-tale-tit," like the old coolie, whose gruff "Talkey Mamma!" never failed to stop her in the perpetration of some secret crime.

"I will learn that bird to talk, Jeanne. And I will give him to you, if God wills he talk by and by."

"Why do you say 'if God wills,' A-kuei? No foreigner ever says it. Mother says it is silly, and like a missionary. And Father says missionaries are mischievous fools."

A-kuei smiled. He was not much taller than Jeanne herself, but he felt he was a century older in knowledge of the world.

"Look here, Jeanne. Missisy teaches you to read and to write every day. What she learns you, you can show me. See?"

"No, I won't," Jeanne answered promptly. Lessons were not so delightful that she should double them—even if she could. A-kuei had looked over her copy-book yesterday, and had challenged her explanation and her spelling of the word "gril." He had said it must be "girl," and when Jeanne had asked the Consul at dinner—when A-kuei was in the room but could not speak—the verdict had been given against her.

"Then I won't give you my bird. I will send away my bird, and give it to American little girl Sallie. Sallie is a good girl; she never eats Chinese cabbage!"

A-kuei brushed past Jeanne, and took down the cage. He sat down in the yard with his back to her, and she could hear him unfastening the door. And then—was it possible?—he began whistling, and the bird answered him. What a note! No mynah sitting up on the great Pride of India near the Consular flagstaff had ever poured forth such a melody. There it was, exactly as the amah had told her the Chinese mynah laments those who have been drowned far away, where the boats have been swamped in the rapids at Ning-kong-jao—

Ning-kong-jao! boat-ah fall down!
Ning-kong-jao! boat-ah fall down!

Jeanne cautiously advanced. But just as she reached the spot where A-kuei was sitting, the lad sprang up, slammed the cage-door, and the singing stopped dead.

"If you don't go out of the yard this moment, Jeanne, I call your amah come!"

Poor Jeanne, all tingling with the music and the excitement! She burst out crying, tears of disenchantment and fear.

"Give me the bird, A-kuei! Give me the bird!"

Her voice rose shrill, and A-kuei became alarmed. The door leading into the house creaked, and Jeanne's amah looked discreetly out. She was A-kuei's aunt, although naturally the relationship was not known to the Consul and Mrs Norris.

"I won't give you the bird, Jeanne. Go away, naughty girl. Amah, come catchey Jeanne!"

The amah was expected to turn a deaf ear to this summons. But Jeanne, busy drying her eyes with her pinafore, was quite unaware of the byplay.

"I will give you my stamp album, A-kuei."

This was Jeanne's standing offer. A-kuei shook his head.

"If you teach me your English lessons, I will give you my bird. But you must write 'girl' and not 'gril.'"

This was an unkind cut, but A-kuei had the whip-hand now. He had what Jeanne wanted, and could afford to dictate his own terms.

"I think, if when you learn your lessons, I can learn too, that will be all right. Then I give you my bird, by and by, you see."

"If Mother taught you!" cried Jeanne, brightening up. "If I get Mother to teach you, may I have the bird?"

The boldness of the proposal almost staggered A-kuei. He stood open-mouthed, silenced for one moment. Then the grandeur of the opportunity offered him brought him to his senses, and with a voice that was only slightly husky with suppressed excitement he assented.

"Your mother?" he said in a half-superior way. "Yes, she will do. You can ask her, Jeanne. Only more better you don't say my bird, you see."

"Ye-es," Jeanne answered slowly. "But I can tell Father, can't I?"

"More better not say anything, Jeanne. By and by your father tell your mother, and then too muchey bobbery for me and for you."

"All right," Jeanne reluctantly assented. "But you will give me your bird, won't you, A-kuei?"

"By and by, by and by," he answered soothingly.

CHAPTER III.

The news of A-kuei's promotion to fellow-pupil with the Consul's "baby" spread like wild-fire over the Settlement at Ssŭ-ming.

For of course Jeanne got her way, and in getting her way put an end to the reign of slipper and screaming. Mrs. Norris was not a good teacher, nor a patient one, but she had at any rate now to deal with one who was only too anxious to learn; and A-kuei's example had a good effect on Jeanne herself,—that is, for a time. The child soon dropped behind, but for very "look-see" slapping was impossible. Jeanne might now gaze dreamily out on the fascinating, sleepy river glittering in the golden sunlight, and not be reproved,—for A-kuei was quite ready to read her portion as well as his own. In writing too he was easily first. Never was there such an eager pupil.

The fat Consul laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks at A-kuei's first attempt at English composition. Mrs. Norris's intimates, who were allowed a private view, laughed too. A-kuei knew that they laughed, and at him. He put away the recollection of that careless laughter in one corner of his mind for use on future occasion. He hated Mrs. Norris for causing the laugh; he hated the Consul and his friends. But they were all necessary stepping-stones in his upward climb; and so he

went round the table composedly, just as though he had never heard the great roar which was suddenly checked on his opening the pantry-door.

He only planned for himself one present revenge. Jeanne should never get that bird.

Not that he disliked Jeanne. Rather the contrary. But the Norris family had wounded his pride, had caused him to "lose face," as the Chinese put it, and as a member of the Norris family Jeanne had to suffer for her parents' trespass. At the same time A-kuei had to reconcile the breaking of his word with his justifiable vengeance—by no means an easy task. There was indeed only one way out of the difficulty. The bird must die, and that a natural death.

But the pity of it! The mynah had survived what the Chinese look upon as the most dangerous month of the year to bird-life; it had sung gallantly against every "snake" (*i.e.* noxious) wind; it came to eat out of A-kuei's hand; and it yelled defiance persistently at Jeanne, whose entreaties for it grew more importunate every day. "By and by" would not serve much longer. Jeanne had threatened to enlist her father's sympathies, and then the possession of the bird was only a question of a few scenes with Mrs. Norris, a little flopping on Jeanne's part, a fixed quantity of screaming on the one side and of sal volatile on the other, and the victory would be gained.

It was a heavy, sultry day when A-kuei offered up his bird and his pledged word as a sacrifice to his offended pride. No one had he found willing to take the burden off his shoulders. The cook had refused to step on the bird when he had found it hopping just under his feet. The next door cat had not even sniffed its way. The old coolie had spent two hours in catching it and bringing it back from the garden when A-kuei had left the cage-door open. The amah had

absolutely refused to interfere or to reveal to Mrs. Norris the design against her happiness on the part of Jeanne. The bird was proof against wind and weather. A-kuei hated himself for what he was going to do, but he never hesitated about the deed. Just a little, a very little dark brown liquid in the tea for which the bird was now perking its head and jumping from bar to bar. A-kuei's hand did not tremble, though his heart seemed to jump into his mouth when he saw Jeanne come on tip-toe round the corner of the verandah.

"A-kuei, I am going to ask Father to-night. Mother has got two new dresses from Paris, so she will not be cross; and amah says I may keep the bird in my room. May I give him his tea, please."

And A-kuei said "Yes." Then he sat down on the other side of the yard, to watch for the end.

It did not come for a long time. The bird was frightened by Jeanne, and A-kuei had to come over and pacify it. Then Jeanne got tired and crept away again, and A-kuei got out his books and tried to forget the evil he was doing by conning over his lesson.

The air was very still now, very oppressive. The bird was very still too. A-kuei got up and went across the yard to look at it again.

There it lay in the bottom of the cage, with its claws turned up towards the sky. But as A-kuei cautiously touched it with his finger, Heaven itself seemed to speak in denunciation of his crime. A terrifying flash of lightning zigzagged before his eyes, followed by an almost instantaneous peal of thunder.

The thin coating of Christian teaching and of Western learning in which A-kuei had wrapped himself fell from him like so much tissue-paper. He could see the avenging Goddess of Lightning holding up her dazzling mirror, so that the God of Thunder might see to launch his bolt at his impious head.

Heedless of dignity, of etiquette, only possessed by his great fear, A-kuei fled into the house and found refuge under the big dining-room table. There he crouched, while the thunder rolled and the lightning flashed, till with a final deafening crash the storm passed further away and the rain came pouring down in floods.

"What side A-kuei? what side A-kuei?"

It was the Consul's voice asking in tones of alarm. They had missed him; they were looking for him; they might come and find him hiding under the table. A-kuei was not so frightened now. He crept out and stood up. Then he opened the pantry-door and slipped out into the yard.

Or, rather, into what had been the yard. The lightning had struck the buildings on one side and had struck A-kuei's room; and a great rent in the wall, a fallen-in roof, and smoking timbers choked the spot where but a short time before A-kuei had stood gazing on the dead bird.

They were searching for A-kuei's body now, the fat Consul of course in the most dangerous place. The amah and Jeanne were looking eagerly on. Even Mrs. Norris was there, in spite of the rain which streamed down. A-kuei, no longer frightened, swelled with his own importance as he came leisurely forward

The servants' laugh of relief—a Chinaman shows both his grief and his gladness by a laugh—was however drowned by a shriek from Jeanne.

"My bird! my bird! Oh A-kuei, why didn't you save my bird?"

CHAPTER IV.

The Chinese are certainly a much slandered nation. Westerners not only deny that they have a literature, a national biography, a government, and all the social virtues, but even that they have a family life. Whereas the veriest globe-trotter knows that the family is the unit in China, and that if one member of it disgraces himself all his kin "lose face."

So when, some two years after the events narrated above, A-kuei abruptly quitted, or rather was turned out of, the British Consulate at Ssŭ-ming, the whole Lin family was involved in his disgrace. The Consul might be a fool; it was quite legitimate to "squeeze" Mrs. Norris to an unlimited extent, *i.e.* make her pay three times the market value for every article of food purchased; but there were certain bounds which no self-respecting Chinaman could permit himself to pass. When it came to actual clumsy, deliberate theft from the Consular safe, A-kuei's family paid up the money which had been stolen, but they washed their hands clean of the offender.

Mr. Norris would have acted justifiably had he sent A-kuei for punishment in to the Chinese authorities. Bambooing, indeed, would have very probably been beneficial to him; but a Chinese magistrate is not a safe custodian even for a murderer. And

A-kuei had certainly not gone the length of murder, although Mrs. Norris declared herself doubtful on that score. The lad disappeared from public life for a few days. The Consul's tender conscience upbraided him for the responsibility of a possible suicide, and Mrs. Norris was so upset that a three weeks' trip to Shanghai was hastily decided upon.

Great then was Mrs. Norris's amazement, and grave the Consul's displeasure, when on returning to Ssŭ-ming after the trip the first person they met was A-kuei himself, strolling along the Bund arrayed in a magnificent plum-coloured silk coat and faultless white leggings! He turned and stared in a peculiarly insolent way at the procession of chairs, nodded familiarly to Jeanne, and continued, in the usual elevated tone of voice of the Celestial pedestrian, to carry on a conversation with another gilded youth who was walking some ten yards behind.

What did it all mean? The Consular constable, who was an indiscriminate hater of the whole Chinese people, met them at the gates of the Consulate bursting with the news.

A-kuei, who had represented himself as suffering for religion's sake, had been received with open arms as a brand plucked from the Agnostic Consular burning, by the latest and wealthiest addition to the missionary body in Ssŭ-ming, a Miss Buxton.

It was summer time, and all the other missionaries were away for their holidays in Japan, up at the hills or in Chefoo. Miss Buxton alone had elected to stay in the broiling Treaty port, to pursue her Chinese studies with her teacher. She had taken in A-kuei, and of course there had been no one to interfere.

"I didn't like to say anything, you see, Sir. I don't know the lady, and from all I've heard of her and her goings on it wouldn't have been of much use to speak. She do seem to have a dreadful opinion of us all!"

The Consul laughed. He was more than half relieved to find A-kuei had not committed suicide, and if Miss Buxton chose to be robbed, why it was her own concern. In his heart of hearts Mr. Norris hoped that A-kuei had only for a moment stepped aside from the path of honesty, and had he only been single, and not had an official position to keep up, he would have been quite ready to give the lad a second chance himself. You can scarcely have a boy over two years in your house and not become attached to him,—not, at least, if you are a Mr. Norris.

But Mrs. Norris, who looked upon all human beings as alternately either angels or devils, and who was moreover highly disgusted at the way A-kuei had behaved after all the trouble she had taken for him, Mrs. Norris was of a very different opinion.

"What! you will allow such a crime to pass unpunished? You will allow this poor *dévote*, this Miss Buxton, to become the prey of that young devil? You have forgotten, then, How much I did for him, and how I allowed Jeanne to be in the same room with him, to breathe the same air, for his lessons? And that he stole my handkerchiefs, ten out of the dozen that came from Paris six months ago? And that he stole Jeanne's bangles too; think of that! the bangles of a baby——"

"He didn't steal them, Mother. I gave them to him."

Jeanne was taller, and thinner, and paler, and older; but she was just as maladroit in her assertions as ever.

"Ah, Jeanne, you drive me mad, you and your father! Neither of you sympathise with me in the least!" And Mrs. Norris threw herself into a cane chair that stood handy and prepared for a fit of hysterics.

The constable discreetly withdrew, and the Consul and Jeanne went down on their knees in abject humiliation. Mrs. Norris's handkerchief was up to her eyes, and every sign pointed to stormy weather, when by some good Providence the amah

entered to announce "Missisy, baf (bath) have got," and the Consul and Jeanne beat a hasty retreat.

* * * * * * *

"I shall go and see Miss Buxton," Mrs. Norris announced as they sat later on at afternoon tea.

The Consul looked up enquiringly, and then shrugged his shoulders. But he volunteered no opinion.

"What does amah say?" asked Jeanne, scratching a mosquito-bite on her hand with a crust of bread.

"*Amah say?* You don't suppose I consult an amah about what I am going to do, do you? What has the amah to do with A-kuei or with my movements? Jeanne, leave off scratching your hand! Your habits are simply intolerable!"

"Only amah is A-kuei's aunt," Jeanne answered laconically. "And the old coolie is his mother's brother, and the cook his great uncle."

"Mercy! where did the child pick up all this? And why didn't you tell me before? Jeanne, ring the bell, and tell amah to bring my hat downstairs. I am going to Miss Buxton now."

"My dear," began the Consul mildly, "had you not better wait? I don't think you will be wise to go—to-day, I mean. You have not called on Miss Buxton yet, though she came six months ago, and at this late date she may not wish to make your acquaintance——"

"I don't care what you think I ought to do! Ah, you are so slow, so lazy! You will sit still while a poor missionary is robbed, perhaps murdered! It is not safe that she should have A-kuei under her roof. He might poison her, as he poisoned his own bird, years ago!"

"*Poisoned his own bird years ago!*"

Jeanne's lips were blanched with horror. Then her eyes—how big they looked in the thin, pale little face!—blazed out like

her mother's. She flew to the amah, who just then waddled into the room, and cried in the Ssŭ-ming dialect, which of course she spoke, unbeknown to her parents, like a native—

"Amah, did A-kuei poison my bird?"

"No savvey," answered the amah in discreet pidgin-English. "No belong my pidgin!"

* * * * * * *

The visit of Mrs. Norris to Miss Buxton proved of course a failure. The Consul, pacing his verandah, could detect defeat in the dejected patter of the home-returning chair-coolies. Jeanne had insisted on going too, and the start had been made in great state, with the big Consular chair, and four coolies arrayed in official uniforms. But now, before the coolies had come up the long avenue, as far away as the great gates, where the gateman dozed away the livelong day, the Consul heard the sound of sobbing, and Jeanne emerged at the verandah-steps with a face dripping with tears, her white frock plentifully besplattered with blood.

Mrs. Norris, trembling from head to foot, was next lifted out, and restoratives applied. Then bit by bit the story came out.

All had gone well at first. A-kuei had not appeared at the door, and Mrs. Norris, a few civilities exchanged, was just about to open the campaign when shrieks and yells had resounded through the house, and Jeanne, her nose streaming with blood, had rushed in and thrown herself upon her mother.

"He hit me! he hurt me! he wants to kill me! Mother! Mother! Mother!"

Whereupon, as was most natural, Mrs. Norris had nearly fainted. And Miss Buxton, in great alarm, had tried to pull Jeanne away. Jeanne, terrified, had kicked and shrieked and clung the closer, and Miss Buxton had called for help.

Then A-kuei had entered, his face one mass of scratches, his scalp half-skinned, and his coat rent in a manner suspicious of pocket-scissors. The marks of Jeanne's nails were all too plainly visible.

He had quietly explained that the Consul's "baby" had stolen upon him unawares—neither of the ladies had noticed her absence from the drawing-room—and had suddenly attacked him; why, he was at a loss to imagine.

"My bird! my bird!" was all Jeanne could sob out. She did not deny the assault; she condescended to no explanation of her own bloody nose. But Miss Buxton, whose shins had felt the force of Jeanne's kicks, became purple with indignation at the unaccountable attack.

"You naughty little girl!" she had ejaculated, shaking Jeanne roughly by the shoulder. "How can you be so wicked? Look how you have hurt him! And he was always so fond of you. Naughty! naughty!"

What mother could have borne such an outrage? A scene worthy of Pandemonium would appear to have followed; but neither Jeanne nor her mother ever gave a consistent report of the matter. Mrs. Norris had slapped Miss Buxton; in return Miss Buxton had lost her temper and—well, the tale varied at each telling. But the result of that visit was the very opposite of what Mrs. Norris had desired, although the Consul heaved a sigh of relief when Miss Buxton announced, after a lengthy dissertation on the iniquities of his wife and daughter in the Consulate office—

"I have resolved to adopt this poor ill-treated and slandered youth. I shall send him to England to be educated as a medical missionary. He may thank your wife for that!"

Mr. Norris's stolid silence had provoked her into this rider. But his answer was not calculated to appease her wrath—

"Not only A-kuei, but all Ssŭ-ming will have reason to thank her for this step of yours, Madam."

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

He was a most astonishing youth, was Mr. A. K. Way. An Oriental to his delicate finger-tips, to his slanting eyes and coarse black hair. Not a shivering blue-nailed Hindu, nor a woolly-headed African, but one of the coming race, a Chinaman out of the Far East.

There was nothing he attempted in which he did not succeed. The hard-headed Scottish laddies were left far behind him in the race for prizes and for learning. I should be utterly discredited as a truthful narrator if I entered into the particulars of his school and college career. How many classes he cantered through in how few months, are they not written in the records of the Gilltown Academy? It is quite wearisome to turn over the pages devoted to that period of years. First prize in classics, A. K. Way; in Mathematics, A. K. Way; in English language and literature, A. K. Way; in natural science; the Town Medal; the First Bursary at Gilltown University,—no name seems to appear but his. Behold him thus at the ages of sixteen, seventeen, eighteen and nineteen. It is always the same—A. K. Way first, and everyone else nowhere.

Everyone knows that Gilltown is a close borough, which looks with distrust, not to say contempt, on anyone who is

unfortunate enough to own another birthplace. But it is possible, by great humility and by atoning for your mistake in being born elsewhere, by a prolonged residence in Gilltown, to win the favour of the townspeople, who in time will adopt you and confer on you the exalted title of Gilltonian. And to be a Gilltonian guarantees a man far more in life than even Freemasonry is supposed to offer. Did anyone ever meet a Gilltonian in need? Did any Gilltonian ever come to the gallows? Just live in Gilltown a few years, and behave yourself, and then, if it is possible after such a training, go elsewhere and spend your substance in riotous living. Will the Gilltonians believe any evil report of you? Not much. They will welcome you home again, and, when you die, erect a monument to your memory by some local artist.

Now A. K. Way lived in Gilltown some five years, and according to all right and precedent he ought to have been a shining ornament to the town. Here was a great chance offered him, but somehow or other he missed it. Despite his undoubtedly brilliant mental capacities, he was cordially disliked. Nor had jealousy anything to do with this dislike, for it was shared equally by his teachers, his Professors, his landladies, and his fellow-students. Never was there such a forbidding, supercilious, unsociable, disagreeable youth. He treated his masters as though they were his paid servants; he disdained friendly proffers of help from his class-fellows; he turned up his nose at wholesome though plain Gilltown fare; he admired nothing in or about the town; he persisted in cleaning his nails and spitting in public,—in short, he made himself thoroughly odious.

He was destined for the medical profession, and to the relief of everyone ran through his course at Gilltown University before he had reached the lowest age at which it was possible to graduate. Professor after Professor passed him on with alacrity to his neighbour. His work was always excellent, if anything too excellent! And yet there was absolutely no evidence that he had

cheated; indeed, the examinations seemed to prove conclusively that A. K. Way's success was honestly won. There were, doubtless, many of his class-fellows quite as coarse-mannered as A. K. Way. But they were so by mere accident of birth and upbringing. The Chinaman was offensive deliberately. The University ladies gave him up as impossible, and, although he had no avowed enemies, everyone breathed more freely when he left Gilltown for the south, to meet Miss Buxton, just home from China. He was to return in six months' time to take his M.B. and B.Ch.

Miss Buxton had been some six years in China, and fully deserved her furlough. No missionary save a Roman Catholic goes out to China for good and all, with no intention of seeing again his or her native land. Why then should Miss Buxton, a wealthy spinster, have stayed out in China when the charm of novelty had been rubbed off the missionary life, just because she had loudly announced her intention of leaving her bones in the Far East when she first came out? Moreover, as an unpaid worker, she had proved a considerable thorn in the flesh to her fellow-missionaries, who were thankful when, with a loud flourish of trumpets, she severed her connection with all the missionary bodies in Ssŭ-ming, and went home to England to recruit. Unkind rumour said she needed to recruit a broken heart, and even named the unworthy rejecter of Miss Buxton's proffered affections, a certain Dr. Porteous, three of whose wives lay side by side in the grass-grown Ssŭ-ming Cemetery. Certain it is that on the day Dr. Porteous married his fourth wife, a lady who had been the bosom friend of his third, Miss Buxton left for Shanghai, whence she indited an Open Letter to the Protestant Missionary body, criticising their methods, and separating herself from them for ever.

If Miss Buxton's heart was broken, it was certainly into very sharp pieces. Arrived in England, she became the terror

of every well-conducted missionary meeting. No platform was safe from her imposing presence, no assembly secure from that strident, penetrating voice which protested against false representations of missionary zeal and hardships, which denounced the pioneers of Protestantism in the Far East as lingerers by the flesh-pots, as lazy, ignorant, even dishonest. Her sweeping condemnation included every one, every place, every thing! What hope, with Miss Buxton on the war-path, of the necessary subscriptions flowing in? Men's hands were stayed in their pockets, women's purses closed with ominous click. And the worst of it all was, the organisers of the meetings could not shut her out. She had never received a penny from any society. She professed to speak of the things which she had seen and heard. And she had the gift of the gab, a very devil's gift it seemed! Secretaries wrung their hands, and wished her—— back in China!

Indeed, Miss Buxton was on the way to create a very great scandal and to seriously interfere with missionary enterprise. China for the Chinese! Such was her war-cry. What, insult one of the most ancient of all civilisations by letting loose in the Far East profane, ignorant fanatics, who condemned what they never sought to understand, who, themselves uneducated, sneered at an education far above the wildest Western imagination? The Chinese needed light, certainly, and Gospel light too. But it must be offered to them in their own way and by their own people, by such an one as her *protégé*, a high-born, intellectual, brilliant youth, trained in the latest school of Western science, who had been disinherited by his family for his adoption of the Christian religion, and who was now ready to devote himself to his prejudiced kinsmen, and thus fulfil Miss Buxton's dream of an up-to-date East,——by A. K. Way.

And A. K. Way himself was a most creditable-looking specimen of a Chinaman. He was small and slender, with daintily

shaped hands and feet, quite a presentable nose, and remarkably thin lips. He did not in the least mind being talked about, while as regarded speaking himself, though he preferred playing the part of the superior, condescending, haughty Oriental potentate, he could be glib, fluent, eloquent, if you will. And he possessed a perfectly marvellous power over Miss Buxton, a totally inexplicable mastery over that otherwise redoubtable spinster. How he came by that power was a standing marvel to all his acquaintances, who heard him flatly contradict Miss Buxton in public, saw him walk out of the room before her, saw her waiting upon him and listening to the words that fell from his lips with breathless admiration. Yet it was A. K. Way who saved the situation in London. For, directly after he arrived from Gilltown, Miss Buxton ceased to attend missionary meetings. A. K. Way set her to write a book of her experiences in China, and sternly forbade all speech-making.

Miss Buxton's book took long in writing, and still longer in printing. A. K. Way must have got very tired of it; but it was the price he had to pay for his introduction into London society, with its gratifying flattery, its listening fair ladies, its circle of admirers. The people he now met took him at his own valuation, which was a pretty exalted one. More than that, Miss Buxton's book gave him unlimited access to Miss Buxton's purse. That good lady was a firm believer in "Trust me not at all, or all in all." Where she trusted, she trusted blindly, pig-headedly. From reading over her manuscript, and freely editing it, A. K. Way was advanced to confidential secretary and treasurer, not copyist; Miss Buxton would as soon have asked such a service of the Prime Minister as of the arrogant Chinese youth who smoked the most expensive cigarettes in her drawing-room, waved aside bills, and scorned the clumsy currency of the West. Thus he arrived at opening Miss Buxton's letters, and at suppressing sundry documents which he deemed it unnecessary

or inconvenient for her to read. In a word, she was completely infatuated by him.

It was very lucky for A. K. Way that Miss Buxton was willing to see things through his eyes. One or two rather awkward points cropped up during those months in London. Sundry Gilltonians put themselves into communication with the young man, and wanted to know the why and the wherefore of certain matters which had come to their notice since his departure from their city. There was nothing very definite ; but careful management was required, and certain sums obtained from Miss Buxton as class-fees were expended rather as hush-money. Perhaps there were cogent reasons why A. K. Way did not find it necessary to go north to take his degree. It was conferred on him *in absentiâ*, and a timely cold quenched Miss Buxton's desire to see him "capped."

When I spoke of London society I meant of course Miss Buxton's particular circle of friends. Now that her mouth was closed, and her whole ardour devoted to proof-sheets, the missionary societies closed round her again. And as the way to Miss Buxton's heart—and purse—lay through young A. K. Way, they cultivated him exceedingly. He was the lion of their tea-parties that winter; he sat by the most eligible young ladies, he smoked cigarettes with the brothers, and romanced on China and his ancestral home to the mothers. Certainly Miss Buxton's own relatives did not like him, but then they were jealous of his influence. Of course they were, and quite naturally too, he told his patroness. He himself would have been jealous in their place.

Miss Buxton laughed, but uneasily. She had come to lean on A. K. Way so absolutely that she had allowed him to make all her publishing arrangements, to cash her cheques, and practically to control her income. So far so good, but when it came to accounting for moneys drawn, to demanding receipts for bills sent

in a second or a third time, A. K. Way was found sadly wanting in a business capacity. He perfectly remembered having paid the sums, but as for the receipts, he had never asked for them, never deigned to take them. He was the Eastern child, confiding, trusting that others were as honest as himself, bewildered by rows of figures, then indignant at the suggestion that he might have omitted to spend the money—"omitted" was the only expression Miss Buxton ventured on—as he ought to have done. What then, he angrily asked, had become of the money? Did Miss Buxton think he was a thief? Ah, that he were back in his own country, where gentlemen did not soil their hands with this dirty money. Would he confront these lying tradesmen? Certainly not. His word to Miss Buxton ought to be enough. Keep accounts in the future? Certainly not. He had never asked Miss Buxton for money; he had never spent any of her money without her authority. And now she believed, who was it? A dishonest tradesman, against an Oriental nobleman!

Miss Buxton was fairly nonplussed. She had still the firmest faith in A. K. Way, but he was certainly very expensive! There was no doubting the totals in her bank-book, and they meant certainly an overdrawn account. She seemed to be spending more and more, and yet she certainly was not aware of becoming extravagant! The "class-fees" were abnormally high; A. K. Way's degree was more costly than it would have been at Oxford or Cambridge. And a thousand pounds was a large sum to pay for the privilege of seeing yourself in print. It was really getting to be time to start A. K. Way in life, to send him back to China, where he himself so longed to be. Indeed, Miss Buxton's own heart was now turning towards the East again, now that *China for the Chinese* was out, the excitement of the reviews had subsided, and the season for tea-parties and dinners was drawing to a close.

"I think it is time we thought of the future, Lao-ta. I have always told you I hoped you would become a medical missionary in China. Do you feel the call?"

Lao-ta, so he had told her, was his special name in his own family. He had warned her not to use it in public, as it meant, according to him, "old boy," and was a term of endearment not suited for the general ear. Luckily Miss Buxton, though she had laboured six years at the Tones, was no Chinese scholar, or she would have been edified to learn that she was addressing the youth by a term of respect used by juniors to seniors, by inferiors to superiors.

"Yes, I am ready to go back to China," A. K. Way answered indifferently. "If you care to go, I will take you back."

"I am not going yet," Miss Buxton answered somewhat testily. "I have to stay a few months longer, on family business. I want you to go out ahead, and start by yourself. Then you can make me a home. It will be better so. But I must first find you a wife."

"A wife?" repeated the young man. "I do not want a wife. I am sufficient alone."

"You *must* have a wife," Miss Buxton went on, ignoring his reply. "I have always meant, always hoped, that you would marry an English wife. Thus the East and the West would be blended. . . . . Yes, the English wife is part of the scheme. Of course I should have wished for you one of my own family, but my nephew won't hear of it. Such stupid insular prejudice, such narrow-mindedness! Well, he shall be the sufferer in the end, and she too. No, Lao-ta, you must marry, and I will find you a wife."

"Your nephew doesn't want his sister to marry me?"

A. K. Way looked at Miss Buxton from under his half-closed lids. That nephew had always been a thorn in his side; that niece had never worshipped him as a demi-god. Yet at that moment he

felt mad that the two should scorn him ; he longed to be master of, and tyrant over, that girl. How he could make her pay for this!

"No, he won't hear of it. Perhaps Lucy's heart is already engaged; indeed, he hinted as much to me. But trust to me Lao-ta, I will find you a suitable wife. I know what is best for you."

"I can't marry. I have no money. And you know that my own family"——

Miss Buxton tapped her foot impatiently.

"When I arrange that you shall marry, I mean that I also provide the means for your marriage. I will allow you a certain sum a year,—a moderate sum of course, but enough to keep an English wife in China in English fashion. No; don't answer yet. Hear me out! It shall be a wife and an income, or provide for yourself!"

Something must have been seriously amiss with Miss Buxton that morning. A. K. Way shot another swift look at her. Surely an enemy had done this. Well, if an enemy had spoken, the young Chinaman had better clear out of England shortly. Of course he was quite safe; he had taken care to destroy any damaging documents, but—could any young man without a penny, brought up with Chinese ideas of the lawfulness of percentages, could such an one have been expected to let slide past him commissions on contracts, such as A. K. Way had been negotiating for Miss Buxton lately, just because he happened to be in England, where an inferior code of trade morality existed? How could money and cheques pass through his hands without leaving a due silver lining? Yet if you take risks such as these, there is always an off-chance of being found out, and your motives and actions misunderstood. Which is, to say the least, disagreeable. . . .

"Very good. You may find me a wife. I will marry her, but only to please you."

Miss Buxton grunted in a half-mollified way. Something stronger was needed to-day. The young man, secretly alarmed, moved a little nearer, and for once put off his supercilious air.

"Choose me a woman like yourself, my honoured friend."

Miss Buxton blushed, actually blushed, as A. K. Way's slender fingers closed round hers. For one half-moment, one mad second, a new idea, an unworthy thought, flashed through her brain. She got up abruptly and left the room.

A. K. Way did not attempt to follow her. Had he done so, had he even dreamt of doing so, what might not have happened! Instead, he took out his handkerchief, and wiped his fingers with an air of disgust. He had touched her—revolting thought! He seated himself in the vacant arm-chair and smiled grimly.

Fate was indeed using him unkindly! She was about to saddle him with a wife whom he did not desire, from a nation which he detested. Either a wife of Miss Buxton's choosing or poverty. A. K. Way felt himself worthy of a better fate.

But although he was so mighty clever, although he was far too smart to be an honest man, his eyes were blinded to the chance that lay straight before him. It never entered into his imagination that he might have had Miss Buxton herself, with all she possessed, simply for the asking.

CHAPTER II.

Lizzie Dale was an orphan, and a dependent on Miss Buxton's bounty.

She was not quite alone in the world, but very nearly so. There was a step-brother, but he had married young, and had enough to do to keep his own head above water. So Lizzie, who had been planted somehow on Miss Buxton, was educated by that lady with a view to becoming a governess, and was sent out to earn her own living at the pitiable age of seventeen.

Lizzie Dale was one of those girls who seem born to be unlucky. She had no happy childhood to look back upon, and no friend save the far-distant Miss Buxton. At school she had always less pocket-money than anyone else; she caught every illness going; she never won a prize; she made no valuable friends. When she went out into the world, the same ill-luck pursued her. Her employers almost invariably turned out either coarse and brutal or insolvent. Her path lay certainly through a vale of tears! But she had one unfailing consolation—a consolation unfailing because incessantly renewed. Lizzie was profoundly sentimental, steeped in romance. Wherever she went, in whatever family she happened to be, there was always somebody

whom she could exalt into a hero, or with whom she could fancy herself in love. Maybe a curate, it mattered not whether he was muscular or a mystic, or haply an elder son of the family, or a brother of the lady of the house, or a lone widower who dwelt hard by. None of these perchance ever looked her way, or were more than half-aware of her existence ; but the knowledge of their neighbourhood sufficed for Lizzie. She lived from one chance meeting to another. Her pupils complained bitterly that they were always made to walk down certain roads, little guessing that their teacher's object was to pass the abode of the hero-for-the-time-being, her hope to meet him and gaze upon him from behind a sheltering veil. In short, she was one of those girls for whom any member of the opposite sex has the strangest attraction, a girl whose life-ambition is to be loved, whose horizon is bounded by marriage,—a type of girl which is perhaps not quite so uncommon, though restrained by conventionality, as the New Woman would have us believe.

Now it happened that just at the time when Miss Buxton was casting about for a wife for A. K. Way, rejecting this one as too independent, that one, alas! as too pretty, Lizzie Dale arrived at the worthy lady's lodgings in floods of tears. Calamity had again overtaken her. The bailiffs had seized her employer's house and goods, the employer had fled the country, his wife and children had followed suit, and Lizzie, of course unpaid, had found herself stranded one fine afternoon in London. Her step-brother was out of town ; the men in possession had refused to allow her to take away her boxes ; the servants had all decamped ; and there was nothing left to do but to come to Miss Buxton. Nor could Miss Buxton do anything but receive her, and of course set to work to recover the detained property. Sharp and short was the struggle over the two battered boxes that held Lizzie's worldly goods, but victory fell to the irate Miss Buxton. Then it was time to start Lizzie in life again.

But how? Lizzie detested her governess-life and had hankerings towards the stage! Towards the stage, of all impossible professions. It was vain to try to represent to her, as after the first shock to her religious principles Miss Buxton did try to represent, that she had neither voice, nor presence, nor influence, nor strength to stand the strain of a theatrical career. All Miss Buxton's scoldings, all her arguments, were answered with floods of tears. On the stage, since it seemed to the love-lorn maiden of twenty-two it could never be in real life, on the stage at least there would be someone to care for her.

Someone to care for her! The phrase haunted Miss Buxton, the self-sufficing, through a most commonplace but extremely aggravating bout of toothache. Seated in the dentist's chair, with the grim instruments of torture round her, she came to a sudden resolve, and could scarcely wait till the offending tooth was extracted before setting out on her campaign.

A. K. Way should marry Lizzie Dale.

It wasn't at all difficult to persuade Lizzie that she was in love with him. Persuade, did I say? Why, she had admired and worshipped him from the first moment she had beheld him, clad in carpet slippers, seated beside a belated spring-time fire. In company, how noble; at home, how mysteriously apart and dignified! But then, was he not of exalted birth? Visions of an ancestral mansion, of waiting slaves, of fountains playing in cool marble courts, of heavy *portières*, of cushions and divans, of fragrant tea and ginger-jars—in brief, a general medley of all the cheap romances which had been her mental food these many years—swam before her dazzled eyes.

The young man had consented to the marriage, ungraciously enough, but had flatly refused to do any wooing on his own account, or to conform in any way to Western ideas of a lover. It was Miss Buxton who bought and presented to Lizzie the engagement ring, who arranged the ceremonial, who named the

day. But to Lizzie all A. K. Way's shortcomings as her appointed bridegroom were right and fitting. She stood greatly in awe of her lord-to-be, trembled when she was bidden to ask him any questions, clung to Miss Buxton's skirts, and never volunteered a word during the brief moments when that deserving match-maker left the pair alone.

So they were married, in a dingy London chapel on a pouring wet day, and Miss Buxton took them straight from the church-door to the steamer lying at Tilbury. She herself had taken their passages, and chosen their cabin, an excellent one on the first-class deck of a P. and O. liner. The voyage was to be done in style. And a couple of days before the marriage she handed a substantial cheque to A. K. Way.

"I shall send you a draft on my bankers in Shanghai before I come out myself, Lao-ta. It will be in Lizzie's name, and my nephew insists that it shall be payable only to her."

There was an unwonted hesitation in Miss Buxton's tone, and her eyes were fixed in an uneasy manner on the floor. Had she looked at the young Chinaman, the expression on his face might have given her pause. But all he said was—

"I shall earn money myself now, and of course repay you for the past, my honoured friend. When you come out to Ssŭ-ming, what will you not find? O, you will be proud of knowing me then!"

CHAPTER III.

"Who is that delicate-looking little woman over there? That sallow-faced girl with the lovely eyes? They are bigger than yours, Jeanne. Do you know who she is, doctor?"

They were some four hours down the Gulf from Suez, and in for the first days of real hot weather. It was about ten o'clock, and Mrs. Norris was just being laid out for the day in her long-chair on the upper deck. Jeanne, a tall, lolloping, freckled girl, had just blundered up with the cushions, which the ship's doctor was assisting her to arrange. Mrs. Norris had by now quite developed into the fanciful, elegant, and most exacting invalid, a slave to nerves and cigarettes, a martyr to neuralgia, excitable, hysterical, with a truly Russian want of perception of the misery she was capable of inflicting on others. With such a constantly sick mother, Jeanne had been left to bring herself up to eighteen as best she could. That best was quite good enough for her father and for her male acquaintances. But Mrs. Norris's sympathetic women-friends, who, villager-like, enjoyed nothing better than hearing categorical accounts of the invalid's diseases and sensations, did not approve of Jeanne. She was too robust, too noisy, too outspoken. How Mrs. Norris ever came by a daughter who loved hockey, had a tennis-arm and wrist, bicycled recklessly, but did

not know how to arrange a pillow, or to fan you without letting the fan hit your face every time! And whose sorrow for her clumsiness took the form of a strangling embrace, a sigh that nearly blew Mrs. Norris's head off. . . . . .

"That girl over there, Mrs. Norris? No, over there? Oh, she is a Mrs. Way, or some name of that sort. Married to a Chinaman, one of those men the missionaries are so fond of bringing over to England to be educated. They say he is a very clever fellow, but to my eyes he looks an awfully sulky young brute. Wonder what was the attraction?"

The doctor thrust his hands deep into his trouser-pockets, and frowned at the little figure seated alone on the sunny side of the ship. Jeanne, the pillows finally flattened down, was off to the cattle-pen and the forecastle. The doctor lazily sauntered after her, and Mrs. Norris, left alone, gazed round the quarter-deck for some kindred spirit to gossip with.

There was no one within hail but a missionary lady, one, so it happened, from Ssŭ-ming, and with whom Mrs. Norris had often quarrelled in old days. But to have someone to talk with was a necessity to the Consul's wife, blessed as she was with the shortest of memories for ancient feuds. So, to Miss Dew's astonishment, Mrs. Norris now made the politest advances, and the two ladies were soon engaged in a cheery exchange of gossip concerning mutual acquaintances.

"And what has become of Miss Buxton?" Mrs. Norris enquired at length. Mrs. Norris had been at home for two years, undergoing various "cures," each of which had been warranted to set her up in health again, yet each of which had somehow or other just failed in doing so. Now with Mrs. Norris, out of sight was always out of mind, and Ssŭ-ming and the foreign community, with its loves and hates, had ceased to interest her until she was on her way out to it again.

Miss Dew tittered.

"Miss Buxton? Have you not heard? Why, it was the talk of Ssŭ-ming for a year at least. Oh, I forgot; of course you were at home when it all happened. She wanted to marry old Dr. Porteous; I believe she almost asked him to marry her; and when he declined to do so (my *amah* told me the whole story, and she had it straight from Dr. Porteous's *boy*), off went Miss Buxton in a huff: threw up the Mission, turned round on our workers, tried to make a regular scandal at home. She certainly managed to make *my* home-coming most unpleasant, and I had to threaten to resign finally before the Society would let me alone. She stuck at nothing, did Miss Buxton. But she has got stuck too, and serve her right! Do you remember your old boy, A-kuei, the one you had years and years ago? Oh, surely you do: the one who robbed the safe in the Consulate—opened it with one of your hair-pins, didn't he? And then Miss Buxton sent him to England to be educated. Well, he is on board this very ship—he calls himself 'Mr. Way' now: A-kuei, A. K. Way, do you see? very smart of him,——*and that girl over there, that English girl, is his wife!*"

"His wife, A-kuei's wife? No, you really don't mean it! Who was she, and however did she come to marry him? Why, he is a most dreadful ruffian, capable of any crime. We never found out till after we had got rid of him that he had tried to poison us all, to kill the whole family! And such a thief, too. Did you notice that mark, that scar on Jeanne's left cheek? She never told me quite how it happened, but there is no doubt that it was made by him, let me see how,—did he scratch her? No, I remember now, he didn't scratch her, but he made a dive at her with his horrid chopsticks. *Mon Dieu!* whatever induced an English girl to marry him! Do you know the story, Miss Dew?"

"My experience is, that some girls are ready to marry anybody, whatever his colour or character," Miss Dew said in a vinegary voice. "Girls are not so particular nowadays as they

used to be. Besides"——and she lowered her voice to such an extent that Mrs. Norris was actually obliged to shift her chair to hear.

"No!"

"I assure you, Mrs. Norris, yes. I had it on the very best authority."

"She ought to be told at once."

"I don't know about that," Miss Dew answered a little nervously. "It is rather too late now; and don't you think it is best to leave married people alone. And then, it was told me strictly in confidence. . . . . Hush! here comes the Consul."

The Consul, silver-haired now and burlier than ever, stared for a moment at his wife's companion. Then, grasping the situation, and being pre-eminently a man of peace, he drew up an ample chair and joined the ladies.

"Tom, that murderer A-kuei, our old *boy*, is on board, and *that* English girl is his wife!"

Mrs. Norris's voice rang out clear and shrill. The little figure on the sunny side of the ship turned its head curiously and met the Consul's good-humoured gaze of astonishment. She flushed up and turned round again.

"Hush, my dear," whispered the Consul. "She hears you. And really you have no right to call him a murderer. And perhaps you are mistaken altogether. I have seen the list of passengers, and there is no such name as A-kuei in it."

"There is no mistake, Mr. Norris," answered Miss Dew tartly. "He calls himself Way, W, A, Y, now; but he is too public a character, has been too well known to our Mission all these years, for any mistake to occur. If you doubt my word, ask the lady if she does not know Miss Buxton!"

"No, pray don't," Mr. Norris put in. "I have no doubt at all that you are right, Miss Dew. My dear Fédore, the lad

is sure to have reformed. I always thought there was no real harm in him, and after all these years in England he has probably entirely changed. At any rate, neither you nor I have recognised him so far. Do you know to what part of China he is going, Miss Dew?"

"Miss Buxton wanted to send him back to Ssŭ-ming and let him take charge of our hospital there; but the Mission persuaded her to let him begin a branch at a place called Taichow, where a hospital is really badly needed. It is quite in the wilds, and I doubt if there is another European there. It will be very lonely for the girl, and I should have liked to be friendly to her, but Miss Buxton, though she knew I had taken my passage by this steamer, never introduced me to Mrs. Way, or asked me to look after her at all. So of course I shall not force myself upon her acquaintance now."

"I think it would be only kind in you to speak to her, Fédore," said Mr. Norris, addressing his wife in his usual tactless way. "There is no ceremony on board ship, no need for introductions——Hey! what is the matter with Miss Dew?"

For that lady had taken up her canvas chair, and was stalking towards the companion in a fashion indicative of huff.

"You are so stupid, so thick-headed, Tom! How could you tell me I ought to talk to that girl when Miss Dew was just telling you *she* couldn't possibly do so? It sounded very rude, and of course she is offended. And she was so amusing! She was just telling me how the new Commissioner's wife had put up her old clothes to auction among the tidewaiters' wives, and how——"

"Offended her, did I?" the stout Consul broke in. "I'm sure I'm very sorry. I think I had better go after her and apologise. I wouldn't hurt her feelings for the world!"

And without listening to his wife's renewed protests, Mr. Norris went after Miss Dew, guided by the clatter of the legs of her chair against the brass-bound steps of the companion.

Dead silence reigned on the quarter-deck for full three minutes. Mrs. Norris lazily watched the little figure on the side where the sun, beating fiercely on the double awning, made the atmosphere grilling. Now the glare was getting below the canvas fastened along the stanchions of the side, and a broad band of light crept slowly across the flooring. Mrs. Way shifted her chair backwards.

"You will get ill if you stay on that side. You will get a sunstroke. Won't you bring your chair over here, near mine?"

It was the voice of the spider calling to the fly.

A well-meaning spider, yet nevertheless a deadly one! And little Lizzie Way, half sick with the heat and feeling lonely beyond telling, gladly accepted the invitation and—walked into the parlour.

Neither Mr. Norris, nor Miss Dew, nor Jeanne, nor the doctor came up on to the quarter-deck for some twenty minutes. Twenty minutes is not a long time, but it is quite long enough to destroy a young wife's chances of happiness, of contentment, to blast her ideals and her life. Mrs. Norris no doubt acted from the very best of motives (what mischief-maker does not?), but she did the worst day's work she had ever done when she forced open Lizzie Way's eyes, and told her what manner of man she had married.

Lizzie did not consciously take in a quarter of what Mrs. Norris said. What she did take in she did not believe, or at least she told herself so. But she could not help noticing that Mr. Norris looked alarmed when he came in sight again, and saw his wife gesticulating in a way only too familiar, and that he did not deny personal acquaintanceship with Lizzie's husband.

"I knew him many years ago," he assented hastily. "Tell him, Mrs. Way, that I shall be pleased to renew my acquaintance with him."

"With whom, father?"

Jeanne and the doctor stood just behind Mr. Norris. But it was Mrs. Norris who answered.

"With your old friend A-kuei, Jeanne."

And Lizzie, who had turned at Jeanne's voice, knew by the sudden flash in the girl's eyes that some of that which she had heard was true.

CHAPTER IV.

Taichow was a long way off. Five days' journey by land in a dirty native chair, carried by still dirtier coolies who were changed every few stages, always to be succeeded by other coolies less and less clad the farther they got away from the Treaty port, until the very shortest of cotton trousers and a greasy cloth round the shoulders presented a most unpleasing picture to Lizzie's untrained Western eyes. The sun shone straight down on to the paddy fields, which stretched east and west, north and south, with a monotony only interrupted by occasional burial-mounds, or a squalid village with narrow lanes and yelping Chinese curs. Then came a belt of opium-poppies, or they crossed a river on a ferry-boat and passed through the great gate of some mud-walled town into more fields and lanes, and past shops and dwelling-houses into the courtyard of some inn, soon to be thronged with men, women and children all run together to look at, talk about, laugh at, or touch the strange white foreign devil. They were a good-natured lot, these up-country peasants, with no grudge against the foreigner, and only amusement at her dress and manner. But Lizzie was the last one to enjoy what to some would have been a kind of royal progress. The staring terrified her; the touching made her shriek or weep. And her husband, lolling about the yard with the air of a master showman, would

shrug his shoulders and tell her she was a fool, or disperse the crowd by some witticism in Chinese which Lizzie vaguely felt had been made at her expense.

And then the smell, that 'great smell of the East,' of which everyone has heard, but which in China means something so very different from the spicy breezes of Ceylon or the odours of Araby! And at the end of the journey Taichow itself, a wretched fishing village inside a grandly bastioned, high-walled, moat-encircled town enclosure, with a beach of rough shingle covered with stinking fish in the process of sun-curing—Taichow without a single other European inhabitant, Taichow which prides itself on its pirates, its oysters and its groves of square-stemmed bamboos. There was absolutely no one for a companion to Lizzie, no one to whom she could talk except her husband; and she felt far too feeble, perhaps was far too unenterprising, to attempt to learn the local dialect. Now and then, at very rare intervals, a China Inland missionary passed through the town, and halted at the house, a Chinese one which had been Europeanised by some pioneer who had succumbed to cholera years ago. Or she caught a glimpse of a Lazarist Father, come into the town to settle some fishing dispute. Otherwise, no one, nowhere to go, and nothing to do.

How much nicer, how far better, it would have been to stay in Ssŭ-ming, in Miss Buxton's own house outside the city walls! But her husband's orders had been Taichow, and when Lizzie had reached Ssŭ-ming, together with the Norrises and the doctor from the mail-steamer, she had been in a mad haste to get away from everyone she knew. In those days she had felt she could not bear the pity she read in the Consul's eyes, the amazement in Jeanne's and the aloofness in Miss Dew's. She resented the tone assumed by all on board towards her husband,—and, what was bitterest of all, she was just a little bit ashamed of her husband herself.

A-kuei was no fool. He read his wife's thoughts almost before she was herself conscious of them. He was perfectly aware (he could scarcely fail to be) of the contempt which the Europeans felt for him. There was no appreciation here, no polite deference, no seeking his acquaintance, among these men and women who had lived in the East for years. As was the Eurasian, so was the European-educated Chinaman to them, stupid, blind creatures of prejudice! A-kuei tried to persuade himself that it was a race-hatred,—tried, and succeeded. But he did not deign to unfold this theory to his wife. A-kuei's Western education had by no means changed his nature. He hated Mr. and Mrs. Norris as cordially as ever. Jeanne he had never hated, even in the days when she fought him tooth and nail. Now he admired her. Had Jeanne only been his wife, instead of this washed-out girl, who was always asking him to kiss her,——he to kiss, or to be kissed, A-kuei, whose whole Chinese nature revolted against kissing, and touching, and petting!

So far as in him lay, A-kuei was in love with Jeanne. With Jeanne who never looked near him, who played deck-bowls with the other passengers and the ship's officers, but never with him, expert though he was at the game; with Jeanne who ran races along the main-deck with the funny little Dutch children bound for Batavia, but whose heart was not in the least moved by the young Chinaman's kindness to the babies (for A-kuei was a true Chinaman in this respect); Jeanne whom everyone liked, of whom no one was jealous, who got all the bouquets and all the sweets at all the ports of call,—with Jeanne the hoyden.

For the sake of Jeanne, A-kuei had almost resolved to disobey orders and stay in Ssŭ-ming instead of journeying on to Taichow. Merely to be in the same place with her, to see her from day to day in that hospital where, so he had heard, she had in quite early days begun to go daily, to help the Chinese Sister-in-charge. What could little, insignificant Lizzie know of what

was passing in A-kuei's brain while he sat by her side at table, facing Jeanne at the captain's right hand? Jeanne never consciously looked his way. Or if by chance their eyes met, Jeanne put on a stony stare that passed right through him, seeing him not, a stare that made A-kuei clench his delicate hand under the table with a savage rebellion against his fate and a mad resolve to force her to notice him, if not now, then . . . . .

But when the ocean voyage was past, and the coasting steamer which carried them all from Shanghai to Ssŭ-ming had fussily turned and backed herself alongside the pontoon and the well-remembered narrow Bund, A-kuei was rudely aroused from his dream to realise the impassible gulf between himself and the Consul's daughter.

That squalid and dirty old woman, bent down and aged before her time, could that be?——yes, it was, his own mother! Toothless and begrimed, with scanty hair dragged back over an ape-shaped forehead, but yet his mother. His father he looked for in vain. A-kuei had shamed the family, had disgraced it, and the family had cast him off for ever. Only the mother had not been able to root him out of her heart; and so she had come, the most unwelcome welcomer, to greet him on his return from the land of the barbarians.

A feeling of sickness, of disgust and anger, boiled up in A-kuei. The presence of the one parent only accentuated the absence of the other. He was an alien among his own people.

And there was Miss Dew, ostentatiously greeting by name the old woman, whose eyes hung with loving anxiety on the smart young Westerner in whom she strove to recognise her son. It was too much for A-kuei. He turned his back on his mother, and, to Lizzie's intense astonishment, addressed her in a kindly voice.

"If you are not too tired, Lizzie, I think we will go on to Taichow at once. The captain will let you stay on board while I

go ashore and find out about the journey. You had better go down into the saloon."

The Norrises were getting into their chairs, laughing and chatting with the various members of the community who had come down to the pontoon to meet them. Miss Dew passed on shore, her nose held high in the air. The Customs' tide-waiters began to disperse about the steamer. Already the donkey-engine had started its clattering whizz. Only one old woman crouched behind one of the posts on the pontoon round which the cables were passed,—but she was the only woman in all Ssŭ-ming that A-kuei did not wish Lizzie to see.

CHAPTER V.

What a funny, solemn little baby Lizzie's was! Only a girl, and therefore of small account to the Chinese household. Ugly, yet so marvellously like its mother. At least so the father said, with a polite sneer, the first time he saw Lizzie holding it after her great illness.

Really A-Kuei's luck had been horribly bad. First, he had a very sick wife, one indeed who promised to be a permanent invalid, on his hands, in this out-of-the-way Taichow, and in this household which was neither English nor Chinese, but had all the defects of both—European grates that gave out no heat, Chinese doors that never kept shut, Chinese food that Lizzie could not eat, and an attempt at English meals which ended in ghastly failure, since Lizzie knew nothing about cookery,—knew nothing, and was far too ill to learn, had she been capable of learning.

The girl had indeed broken down completely when, in addition to the uncongeniality of her surroundings, the fatigues of the journey and the aimlessness of her existence, the strain of coming motherhood had been put upon her. A-kuei had nursed her carefully, for was she not the security for his income? Miss Buxton had given him clearly to understand that it was on Lizzie's life that his expectations were to be based. And so he kept her alive, dragged her through a terrible fever, choked down

his growing distaste for her, tried to forget Jeanne and Ssŭ-ming, even opened a dispensary and unpacked some of his drugs, until, when the battle for Lizzie's life was won, and there was no danger for her physically, only mentally, then A-kuei found that he had laboured in vain, and bound the millstone round his neck for naught.

For Miss Buxton died the very day that Lizzie's baby was born, and left A-kuei nothing.

Rather worse than nothing; indeed, a considerable balance on the wrong side. For her nephew, in informing A-kuei of his patroness's decease, added that before her death Miss Buxton had received ample proofs of the worthlessness of her *protégé*. His enemies in Gilltown had come down upon her; his accounts had been examined; the "class-fees" were scouted at. After the Gilltown disclosures, cheques cashed in London by A-kuei had undergone a scrutiny. In short, only death had prevented Miss Buxton from following A-kuei to China, to "hand him over to the Chinese authorities" for embezzlement, forgery and perjury.

A-kuei had bungled again as clumsily as when he had robbed the Consulate safe. He could of course snap his fingers at "the authorities"; but he was once more adrift. Adrift, but no longer free. For he was saddled with a sick wife and a puling infant. He was safe certainly in Taichow, but Taichow was not the goal of his ambition; he was sick to death of his life there already. He very much doubted whether Miss Buxton's irate nephew could get hold of him anyhow, even within the limits of a Treaty Port. But he hated a row and a scandal. And then, this foreign woman . . . . . .

The letter had come just as Lizzie was out of all danger and was beginning to drag herself about the house. Into his study she came that morning, furtively seeking a smile of welcome. He was very ungracious to her nowadays, and the feeling of

affection which had grown out of her gratitude to him for his care of her while she was sick was fast fading into terror.

A-kuei sat glowering behind his desk. Lizzie went up to him and timidly put her arm round his neck.

He could not bear her touch at the best of times. Nor was there now any necessity for bearing it any more. He peevishly shook his shoulders free and got up.

"Give me a kiss, Lao-ta."

"No, no," he answered angrily. "The time for kissing is over. No Chinese husband ever kisses his wife. Sit down over there, and leave me alone,—no, I'll put your chair into the verandah. I want my room to myself, do you understand? I never want you here at all. When I do want you I'll let you know quick enough. What's in my letter? Why, that Miss Buxton is dead, and that our income stops. Here, read for yourself!"

He tore off the first half-sheet of the letter (there was nothing compromising in that), flung it on her lap, and locked himself into his study.

Lizzie sat down bewildered, dazzled by the bright spring sunshine. The letter lay where it had fallen, and she blinked away the too ready tears. For the first time, so it seemed to her to-day, she realised that her husband, the person in all the world who ought to have wanted her, did not care to see her. And of course the fault was not in her, not in him. It was all because of this baby, this miserable, wailing little creature that had haunted her delirious dreams, that had been thrust upon her, she who was sick to death of other people's children, this girl that her husband despised, this baby that repelled her with its great hungry reproachful eyes. The maternal instinct had not awakened in Lizzie, and this child, who would have been intensely pathetic to a motherly soul, only filled her with disgust and loathing. The tears began to trickle down her thin and sallow cheeks. Splash

they fell on the letter, and Lizzie, in a nervous dread of what her husband would say, wiped them off and took up the sheet.

The words did not convey much meaning to her. Miss Buxton was dead; well, that didn't matter. Lizzie had forgotten all Miss Buxton's past favours; she only remembered that it was she who had got them sent to Taichow. Mr. A. K. Way would not receive any further remittance; well, how should *that* matter? He had his family to fall back upon, in that ancestral home somewhere "up-country." Or failing that, there was the Ssŭ-ming Mission, or even Miss Dew and the Norrises. Lizzie had not been let into her husband's confidence. So it all seemed very simple to her, so simple that she walked along to the study window, which A-kuei had not bolted—it being indeed rather too warm a day to allow of his doing so.

"Here is your letter, Lao-ta. I don't think it will make any difference to you, except that you have lost a kind friend."

Lizzie's voice trembled a little. A-kuei's back was turned to her, but he wheeled round with such an expression of wrath on his ordinarily placid countenance that his wife was alarmed.

"You think it makes no difference, do you? Then pray why did I marry you? Did you think it was for *yourself*?"

She stared at him open-mouthed, terror making her speechless. The speechlessness only increased his fury.

"I married you because *she*, Miss Buxton, promised me money with you. Do you think I would have married you, ugly little beast, unless I was to be handsomely paid for it? You, you fool, you idiot! I hate you; I have always hated you. Get out of my sight!"

For once in his life A-kuei lost all control over his temper. Lizzie instinctively crouched down as the torrent of foul-mouthed abuse poured over her. She had not even the pride, or the strength, to move away. It was A-kuei who flung past her out of the house. But when the baby's amah, attracted by the loud

voice, came peeping round the corner, she found her mistress lying face downwards on the floor, a dash of blood colouring the white foam on her lips.

CHAPTER VI.

News travelled very slowly between Taichow and Ssŭ-ming. Indeed, a person might be dead and buried for a year in the former place before it became known in the latter. So when, about six months after the events narrated in the last chapter, A-kuei appeared in Ssŭ-ming dressed in the deepest mourning, and announced that his wife had died in Taichow some few weeks previously, no one was astonished. A-kuei himself was a most disconsolate widower. He had not been able to bear Taichow alone. Every step had reminded him of his terrible loss. Therefore when his house caught fire, and his dispensary with all his drugs and instruments was destroyed along with it, the only course that had presented itself to his mind had been to return to Ssŭ-ming and offer his services at the hospital there.

He arrived in the very nick of time. The Mission and port doctor fancied himself on the point of breaking down, and was in the midst of negotiations with a man at home for the purchase of the Ssŭ-ming practice. But matters such as these are not settled by return of mail, even if your correspondent happens to be where letters reach him easily—which was not the case in the present instance. The doctor-to-be had still six months to put in on that mail-steamer which had brought the Norrises and the A. K. Ways out to the East. And in the meanwhile A-kuei stepped into the

acting billet of doctor-in-residence to the Ssŭ-ming Mission Hospital.

A-kuei had made a bold step when he put himself within reach of foreign justice. The event, however, fully justified his boldness. And he had, after all, allowed Miss Buxton's nephew six months in which to make his accusations. Evidently none had been forthcoming. In all probability the nephew had no intention of throwing good money after bad, and meant to drop his aunt's *protégé* instead of prosecuting him. There was small chance of anything leaking out through the members of the Mission. One must take a few risks in life, especially when those risks are associated with possible and brilliant gains. And, before and above all, there was Jeanne.

A-kuei had learnt many things about foreign women during his married life. He had learnt that their greatest ambition was to be married, that the true way to manage them was to bully them, and that they were useless and expensive. With this stock of experience he had felt himself sufficiently equipped to tackle Jeanne Norris. And of course there was plenty of opportunity for tackling her. Jeanne was altogether a modern-day girl. Home was far too small for her; to sit and talk small talk with her mother and her friends was waste of time; the servants ran the house far better when she left everything in their hands; garden work was uninteresting; she was the only unmarried girl in the place. Music she detested, likewise sketching. But the Mission Hospital, and the tending of the sick, the binding-up of wounds,—here Jeanne was all at home, quite in her element. And A-kuei had the whip-hand of her here, as he had had it in the old days, before he fell from grace. He was a skilful operator; and he allowed Jeanne to hold the sponges and hand the knives. The port-doctor had never allowed this, and the idea of such a possibility had never entered the heads of Jeanne's parents. But when A-kuei, with studied off-handedness, had told Jeanne to superintend the

preparations for an operation, then ordered her to hold the patient's hand while he administered the chloroform, and then to give him the various knives, Jeanne had never dreamt of disobeying, and had had no time to turn faint and sick at the sight of blood. A-kuei did not seem a human being to Jeanne at such a time. He was (or pretended to be) too busy to notice her or to think of anyone but his patient. Yet all the while his hands were busy he was watching Jeanne unceasingly. And he noted with triumph that the next time they met she shook hands with him, which she had never done before.

Jeanne never told her parents about those operations. Mrs. Norris would have made "no end of a fuss and row," and Jeanne had a very strong idea that the Consul would not, in this case, see things through his daughter's eyes. He would not, as her mother certainly would, have forbidden her to be present at any more, but he would look distressed and be a bit silent and fidgetty. And he had quite enough to worry him anyhow, poor man! Thus Jeanne salved her conscience, and did what she told herself was an obvious duty, both acted as A-kuei's head nurse and did not tell her parents. This was all the easier since there was a guilty compact between the Consul and Jeanne not to tell Mrs. Norris that A-kuei, or "Mr. Way," was in Ssŭ-ming at all. Of course they ran scores of risks of her finding out the fact through some outside channel. But the Consul's wife now never stirred outside the Consular Compound, and always declined to hear anything about hospitals, Chinese missions, or foreign missionaries. So both Jeanne and her father held their peace, and if the girl occasionally came home looking a little white, and with no appetite for "tiffin," only A-kuei and herself knew the reason why.

They had had a very bad case this morning, one that no young girl under 20 ought to have been present at. Even A-kuei himself, hardened to all suffering and with the profoundest

indifference for the life or death of his "subject," had hesitated a little before ordering Jeanne to be in the room. But the weeks were slipping away, and although Jeanne now always shook hands with him, he was not getting any "forrarder" with her. Only over the operating table was he her master, only across a sick-bed did that half-frightened, half-reverent look come into her eyes. What a grand girl she was, biting her lips, with her nails dug into her palms, to keep herself under control at some critical moment! How quick to understand a turn of the eyelid, with how gentle a touch, with what music in her voice! Compare her with that little Lizzie and her Cockney twang? Why, there was a greater difference between Lizzie and Jeanne than between Jeanne and A-kuei himself—a far, far greater difference.

But for once Jeanne failed him. It was such a very bad case, and such a hot day, and I suppose the fumes of the chloroform had something to do with it. At any rate, after the table and A-kuei and the patient had all whirled round and round in the most stupid fashion, everything and everybody went out, and the last thing Jeanne remembered was the cold, clammy terror that seemed creeping down her spine. Nothing more till she opened her eyes on A-kuei gently fanning her, with an arm under her head and a face of the most anxious solicitude quite close to her own.

The face was hastily withdrawn, and so was the arm. A-kuei was the doctor, and only the doctor, in an instant. But it was Jeanne's doctor now, not a hospital surgeon.

"You are to drink this, Jeanne, and to lie quite still till I come back. Do you understand?"

Jeanne understood only one word, and that was the word "Jeanne." She made a futile struggle to get up, and then turned her head angrily away. But it was of no use resisting. She had come quite to the end of her tether, and tears, hateful,

idiotic tears, began streaming down her cheeks. She couldn't have prevented herself crying any more than she could have moved.

"Drink this up quick, Jeanne. There, that's right; you are reasonable at last. Lucky for that poor woman in there that you did it just now. I'm free now to finish her off."

Free though he was, A-kuei did not move yet. He stood looking at Jeanne, in a way curiously unlike his usual haughty expression. There was a nervousness about him now, a want of self-confidence that even Jeanne, ill though she was, could not help noticing.

"I am going," he said at last. "Jeanne, you want that woman to live, don't you?"

Jeanne feebly nodded assent. She could not utter a word.

"I will save her for you, then. But you must promise to help me nurse her."

It was not till many days after that it suddenly flashed upon Jeanne that she had given herself over into A-kuei's power, for the life of a poor Chinese woman.

CHAPTER VII.

"I don't like Jeanne's looks," remarked the Consul to his wife, as they sat together on the verandah in the lovely autumn sunshine. "She isn't eating, either. I wish we could get some distraction for her. Suppose you took her up to Shanghai?"

"Jeanne? There is nothing wrong with her at all, at all! Look how fat she is. Or if there is anything wrong, she gets it from that horrible hospital to which you allow her to go. Among dirty Chinese, instead of with her own mother! Jeanne has disappointed me sorely; she is no companion for me. Always so restless, never sitting still, no repose. But you are right; she has been looking pale. We will see how she likes to go to Shanghai. If I am strong enough to bear the journey!"

But Jeanne would not hear of Shanghai. She needed no change, had no time to go away. She was quite well, quite strong—though her pale cheeks and hollow-looking eyes belied her words. When her father gently urged her to go, for her mother's sake, Jeanne only answered with a flood of tears. And the Consul, who had never seen Jeanne weep before, was more alarmed than ever. He consulted his wife again.

"Jeanne cry? That is the best I have heard of her for a long time. Perhaps her heart is waking up. And I am really too ill to go now. We will put it off."

So the trip was put off, and Jeanne sank deeper into slavery.

Whither was she drifting, or, rather, being carried off her feet and sorely against her will? It was wicked, nothing short of devilish, to make her, Jeanne, responsible for the lives of those patients of A-kuei. Yet their well-doing, their cure, was evidently dependent on her presence at the hospital. She had tried staying away, even ignored urgent summonses, and what had been the result? Jeanne shuddered at the recollection. But she was bound to secrecy, and there was no one to help her. The Chinese stood aside stolidly and let A-kuei go his own way. No one lifted up a finger for Jeanne; there was no one of whom she could ask advice. And, worst horror of all, A-kuei had begun to make love to her, in his own quiet, masterful way. He had arranged all his plans. Jeanne was to go away with him—he did not say "go," but "I will take you"—to Shanghai, and be married there. He would not marry her in Ssŭ-ming, nor bring her back to the place. But they would sail for America, and there start life together, and forget China and kindred and friends, and conquer the world together.

How did A-kuei get Jeanne to listen to this? I cannot tell you; indeed I think he had to repeat the same words every day for a week on end before she fully took in what he was driving at. She never made any answer, nor did she attempt to stay away from the hospital. Her very will-power was weakening under this intolerable bondage. She could not have trusted herself to speak to him, to round on him, and crush him with her scorn. At home she raged and fumed; in A-kuei's presence her courage forsook her and she became an abject coward. One day he would make her say yes; and then? Why then nothing would remain for her but the river . . . .

But just when things had got to the darkest, and decision had become a matter of very few days, when she knew that Friday would see her either dead or away in Shanghai, A-kuei bungled once more, and Jeanne was delivered.

The angel of deliverance was Miss Dew, who suddenly appeared in Mr. Norris's office one morning and demanded an interview on a matter of urgent importance. So the message came to the Consul, who was trying to coax his wife to eat her breakfast.

"See her here," ordered Mrs. Norris.

"I think, my dear, it will be best for you not to have her this morning. You did not have a good night."

"And so you wish me to have a bad day, do you? We are great friends, Miss Dew and I. She always amuses me. What, you are not going over to the office to see her, are you? Why don't you let her wait? . . . Amah, put my room tidy. I expect a visitor."

No visitor, however, was to amuse Mrs. Norris that morning. Nor did her husband come back till late, quite late for tiffin. And with him came back Jeanne, looking like death. Questions died on Mrs. Norris's lips when Jeanne, after a lamentable effort at a smile, collapsed in a heap, and was carried up by her father to bed.

Very urgent indeed for Jeanne had been Miss Dew's business, though even that good lady little guessed that her promptitude of action had saved the Consul's daughter from worse than death. Miss Dew had brought Mr. Norris a letter received that very morning from Taichow. And in it Lizzie Way, supposed by all in Ssŭ-ming to be dead and buried, wrote imploring Miss Dew to give her tidings of her husband, who had left her some five months before "on Miss Buxton's business."

"Our house has been burnt down," Lizzie wrote, "and how I escaped I can't imagine. The fire broke out in my very room, the night my husband left. If he is dead, you would surely know, and somebody might come to bring me away from this awful place."

"And he poses as a widower," snorted Miss Dew, "and carries on with girls at the hospital!"

"At the hospital? Oh yes, of course I shall find him at the hospital. Thank you, Miss Dew. You may leave the matter in my hands now."

* * * * * * *

A-kuei vanished from Ssŭ-ming that night. And the Consul, sitting by Jeanne's bedside, gently stroking her hand, got out the whole story bit by bit.

"So you tried to run your own apple-cart by yourself, eh, Jeanne? Your old father was too big a donkey to be put into the shafts? Perhaps you are right, only I'm sorry you didn't tell me, you know."

There was a pathetic attempt at jocularity in the Consul's voice. Jeanne should not, if he could help it, ever know what bitterness it was to him to find that his daughter had not confided in him, had no faith in his protecting power, had so nearly failed him altogether. No doubt he deserved this blow, but it was hard that it should have come from Jeanne, the only creature in the world capable of really hurting him.

"I was afraid you would tell Mother."

The Consul caught at the reason as a salve for his smarting wound.

"Tell Mother, Jeanne? Oh no, dear, we could never have hurt her so much. By the way, I don't think we need mention it to her now, do you?"

And Jeanne heartily agreed.

PART III.

CHAPTER I.

Jeanne and the new doctor—the ship's doctor turned port-doctor—were arranging the drawers in that self-same Mission Hospital where A. K. Way had once reigned. There was great need of arrangement, and somehow or other four pairs of hands, neither more nor less, were required. Bandages and lint were hopelessly muddled; forceps, lancets and surgical knives lay heaped together, waiting for a carbolic bath. It is wonderful how long it takes two people to do anything, how much longer than it takes one man or even one woman.

Jeanne, with the utter oblivion of the past which is one of the privileges of the young, was balancing against the operating table, holding one end of a bandage while the doctor pretended to roll it up. Pretended I say with intention, for he had let it drop three times just when their hands met at the finishing roll. For then their eyes always met too, and their cheeks would flame, and Jeanne would say with a husky laugh—

"Butter-fingers!"

A judicious cough behind them advertised the coming of a third party. It was the old Mission preacher Lin, and he had

been hanging about the door for twenty minutes, waiting for the foolery to end. But as the rolling showed no sign of ending, and old Lin's presence was anxiously required at the drawing of an important Chinese lottery on the other side of the city, his patience had become exhausted.

Jeanne fled to the window, carrying away in her haste several miles of tangle.

"You can come outside, sir?" the old preacher whispered in the doctor's ear.

Now Dr. Smith's Chinese was still in the infant stage, while Jeanne of course chattered like a native. So he looked enquiringly at her. But Lin shook his head.

"Miss Jeanne, will you excuse me for a minute?"

It had got to "Miss Jeanne" long ago. He had intended that it should get to "Jeanne" to-day—if only she hadn't always said "Butter-fingers!"

Jeanne nodded assent. Then she set herself to undo the tangle alone.

All the bandages had been rolled up; the lint was in first-class order, and Jeanne had finished sorting the instruments after a fashion of her own inventing before the doctor came back.

"Miss Jeanne," he said awkwardly, and then stopped. "Jeanne——"

Jeanne lifted to him a startled face. Was it not in this very room that she had been compelled to hear "Jeanne" before? A horrible shame gripped her heart tight and set her cheeks in a flame. But the doctor was clearly not thinking of her and her crimson cheeks at that moment. He was frowning heavily and trying to chew the ragged ends of a reddish moustache.

"I want you, I would like you, to stay with a poor English woman who has been brought here by Lin. I must go across myself and speak to your father. She is in trouble, and I think

wants a country-woman to speak to. I couldn't make out Lin's story myself, and he was obliged to go away——"

His explanation never came to an end. Jeanne was out of the room, along the passage and into the bare entrance hall long before. And Dr. Smith following saw her stoop down and pick up a tiny, black-eyed, black-haired child which was standing finger in mouth solemnly staring at its unconscious mother.

"My goodness!" ejaculated Jeanne. "It's A-kuei's wife!"

* * * * * * *

"No, I won't have her under my roof. A-kuei's wife live in my house? What are you dreaming of! No, doctor, no, no; my mind is quite made up. She must be a dreadful woman herself ever to have married that murderer, that thief, that brigand. It's of no use talking to me any longer, for I won't listen!"

Mrs. Norris's voice rose to a shriek, and she stuffed her fingers defiantly in her ears. Mr. Norris stood helplessly by. He had given in to her whims for some twenty odd years, terrified by her threats of suicide, of publishing abroad his treatment of her,—he the lamb, the silly sheep before the shearer! And, moreover, suppose Mrs. Norris found out, at this late hour, that painful passage between A-kuei and Jeanne? How much, or how little, did Mrs. Way know about that sojourn in Ssŭ-ming? So, torn by doubt, by feelings of which the doctor could know nothing, the Consul stood in silence, and let himself be misunderstood. The doctor felt a pitying contempt for the great, burly Consul and his good-natured weakness. But he also recognised the hopelessness of the situation.

"Come away, Consul. Leave her alone."

Mrs. Norris's fingers did not prevent her hearing when she wanted to do so. She turned on Dr. Smith with lips trembling with passion.

"You dare to speak to my husband about me in this way? He shall not leave me alone if I wish him to stay. Tom, order Dr. Smith to leave the house!"

Now the doctor had a bit of Irish blood in his veins, and Mrs. Norris went just beyond his limit of endurance.

"Leave the house, did you say? That I will. And never enter it again till you come and beg me on your knees to do so!"

He could not resist a parting bang of the door. Behind him, as he ran down the stairs and out of the house, he could hear Mrs. Norris shrieking in a hysterical fit. He knew she was making herself ill, and the knowledge gave him a grim satisfaction. "Serve her right!" he kept on repeating aloud. Jeanne, and prudent conciliation, and that subtle sympathy with a mind diseased which is the hall-mark of every true doctor, all momentarily vanished from his brain.

"What is the matter, doctor? You nearly knocked me down. She is quiet now, and I'm going home to get a room ready for her."

Jeanne and the doctor collided in the narrow lane outside the Consulate gate, just where the Chinese booths sent forth their peculiar sickly odour of frying batter and the shopkeepers lolled in the darkness behind the windowless shop-fronts.

Dr. Smith gave a bitter little laugh.

"The matter? Why, your mother won't take her in, and has turned me out of your house."

"Mother? But you surely weren't such an ass as to consult Mother?"

No young man of six-and-twenty, with his back thoroughly up, likes to be called an ass, even by the girl he is hoping to marry. Dr. Smith kicked a ruffianly Chinese cur that was sniffing round him in a ferocious manner. But he answered nothing.

"I'll go and settle matters for you," Jeanne went on. "Men are such muddlers. You should have let me go to begin with. If you'll make for the hospital, and see how Mrs. Way—that's her name—is, I'll send a chair for her in half-an-hour. Why, doctor, you are not angry with me, are you?"

"Oh no," Dr. Smith answered in a huffy tone.

"Shake hands, then, to show there is no ill-feeling!"

Jeanne was hopelessly tactless.

"There are Chinese looking on," the doctor growled. "We should get talked about."

"Talked about be damned!" he swore to himself some five seconds later.

CHAPTER II.

"It's a great pity, a great pity, doctor, but what am I to do? She is so delicate, and her heart is so weak that if I opposed her it might cost her her life. I'm sure, being a medical man, you don't require me to give you any further explanation of the most unfortunate scene——"

The Consul's face was streaming with perspiration. He, who as a general rule never stirred outside his compound or out of reach of his sick wife, had come down, first to the doctor's house and then on to the hospital, where Dr. Smith was airing his brand new wonderful Chinese to his native assistant.

"Oh, all right. I quite accept your apology."

This was not exactly the tone Mr. Norris had expected. Still, he had a message to deliver, so he lingered on while the doctor leisurely finished his conversation with the Chinaman.

"My daughter begs you will bring Mrs. Way up to the Consulate at once. My wife has promised to raise no objections, and I have come myself to take charge of the lady."

"Thanks, Consul. But I have just settled that Mrs. Way is to go to my house. I have a spare bed-room, you know. I have settled it," the doctor added in a determined voice, seeing the Consul's look of amazement.

"But, my dear Smith, are you acting wisely? Will you not lay yourself open to—some misunderstanding? Do you know the unfortunate girl's story, and the man to whom she is married? And the personal risk to yourself?"

Now the doctor did not know the story, for two good and sufficient reasons. First, because Lin had not told him all, but had merely hinted at what had happened, mentioning no names. And second, because of Lin's hints he had understood only about one-tenth, owing to his ignorance of the preacher's language. But Dr. Smith was angry, and being angry was not inclined to listen to reason.

"Is the chair ready?" he asked his assistant.

The Chinaman nodded. And the Consul, gravely disturbed, and doubting whether he should reveal more of A-kuei's story to this obstinate young man, was forced to stand aside while the doctor, deliberately ignoring his presence, went to fetch the mother and child.

It was only after the chair had disappeared that Mr. Norris awoke to the necessity of taking farther action in the matter.

"I will go to Dr. Porteous at once," he said.

* * * * * * *

Dr. Porteous, head of the Ssŭ-ming Mission and nominal proprietor of the Mission Hospital, was at home and received the Consul graciously,—much too graciously in the eyes of Mrs. Porteous, smarting under various slights which Mrs. Norris had from time to time put upon her. Mrs. Porteous was a tall, angular lady, with spectacles and a masculinely hidden lip and chin. Mr. Norris longed for her to leave the room on her own initiative, but she showed no signs of any such intention. In vain he coughed and fidgetted and sighed. Mrs. Porteous seemed glued to her chair, and knitted severely on. The Consul felt himself growing damp with despair.

"Can I see you alone, Doctor? Perhaps Mrs. Porteous will excuse—"

Mrs. Porteous rose with a sweeping bow, and passed—into the verandah. Mr. Norris shifted his chair closer to her husband.

"Have you heard the last thing your young doctor, that fellow Way, has done?"

Dr. Porteous had not heard, but he was not going to tell the Consul so.

"Way does not belong to our Mission any more, Consul. He is a free-lance. I may add that our Mission refused to regard him as a member after some rather extraordinary stories that were circulated among our converts in connection with the hospital here, and his behaviour to——Ah, you doubtless know the story yourself, Consul. But to return. I am, of course, deeply interested in all Christian work, however unworthy or humble the worker. And young Way——?"

Dr. Porteous made a diplomatic pause. The Consul, already anything but comfortable, fell heedlessly into the trap.

"Way's wife, that English girl he married in England, has just arrived at the hospital from Taichow. Her story is, so far as I can gather from Dr. Smith, that she has neither seen nor heard of her husband for eight months."

"Not the first time that has happened to her, perhaps! But you were speaking?"

Dr. Porteous's voice invited further revelations. Outside in the verandah a chair scraped along the tiles, nearer the window.

"Knowing what a scamp he has always been, I am naturally concerned for the lady. She is English, and as British Consul I feel responsible for her."

"Certainly, certainly," Dr. Porteous assented. "Had her husband belonged to our Mission, I should undoubtedly have

felt responsible for him. But, as he doesn't——. Have you any more particulars?"

"No, not exactly," stammered Mr. Norris. "I came to you because I thought that probably your preacher, Lin, who is the father of the missing man, might be able to throw light on the matter. Does Lin never speak of his son?"

The chair in the verandah scraped again, this time in an opposite direction. Mrs. Porteous was making for the servants' quarters.

"From time to time, from time to time," Dr. Porteous answered, nodding his head. "May I ask why?"

Mr. Norris got up. The empty chair in the verandah gave him courage.

"My daughter tells me that she has learnt from Mrs. Way that one night she and her little girl were roused from their beds, hurried into chairs, and brought, travelling day and night, to Ssŭ-ming by a strange old Chinawoman, with whom, not knowing the language, Mrs. Way was unable to converse. This old woman brought the mother and child, and dumped them down in the courtyard of the Mission Hospital, where my daughter Jeanne and Dr. Smith happened to be at that moment. I wanted Mrs. Way and her child to be taken to the Consulate, pending enquiries, but——"

Mr. Norris stopped short.

"Well?"

Dr. Porteous had clasped his hands judicially. He for one was enjoying the situation. Mr. Norris come to him, for confession, for advice! He felt the pleasure of the school-master in face of the urchin to be caned.

"There was a slight misunderstanding," the Consul stammered, "and in the meanwhile she has gone to Dr. Smith's house."

"Ah!"

Mr. Norris wiped his streaming brow, and sat down again.

"And what has all this to do with me, please?"

The Consul started. True; what had all this to do with Dr. Porteous? He was neither Consul nor A. K. Way's spiritual chief. Mr. Norris quite forgot that he had come to the missionary's house not knowing why. He had acted on impulse, and without taking Jeanne's advice first. Surely he was, as Jeanne so often told him, the biggest duffer ever born.

Dr. Porteous blew his nose triumphantly. He was wiping off a long score that was marked up against this lazy, heathen Consul, this mandarin-loving, convert-despising representative of Great Britain.

"I have found out the whole story!"

Dr. Porteous turned round on Mrs. Porteous with a scowl. Women, women, could never hold their tongues. What his wife should have done would have been to let Mr. Norris depart discomfited. Then, and only then, should the "whole story" have been confided to Dr. Porteous, to be acted upon judiciously. But these women! Everything they hear must come out, at once. And, scowl or no scowl, Mrs. Porteous was launched on her story.

"It is the most scandalous thing of all the scandalous things he has ever done. A-kuei has now deserted his wife and child for good and all. Declares he was never married at all, and that this girl has never been his wife. Now a childless, rich old Chinaman has adopted him, somewhere near Taichow. He managed to cure this old man of some disease or other, it seems, so he was adopted out of gratitude. But *that* is not the worst. Last month he married a rich Chinese girl. Our servants say that the only marriage that binds a Chinaman is the one when the red bridal chair is used. They laughed when I said he had been married already, and told me A-kuei himself had always said no."

The Consul's face grew ashen white. His little Jeanne—what might have become of her too! Dr. Porteous gaped at his wife, utterly confounded. Mrs. Porteous went on.

"Lin's wife, A-kuei's mother, received this letter at the time of this last marriage. She has just given it to me."

A much-thumbed Chinese letter was handed to Dr. Porteous, who silently passed it on to Mr. Norris.

"Mrs. Lin went at once to Taichow and brought Mrs. Way and her child to Ssŭ-ming, to hand them over to their fellow-countrymen—you see he repudiates the child also. You, Mr. Norris, are to explain to Mrs. Way what has happened, and I presume you are also to provide for her."

CHAPTER III.

Mr. Norris stumbled out into the glaring sunlight, that fatal letter in his hand.

Luckily he had not far to go. Jeanne was watching for him at the Consulate gates.

"Father, what has happened?"

Mr. Norris groaned. He was hot, and tired, and half-distracted.

"Won't he bring her here?"

In Jeanne's mind there was only one he,—Dr. Smith. In Mr. Norris's mind there was also only one he,—A-kuei.

"Bring her here, child? Why, he has left her now for good and all, and married a Chinese girl!"

Jeanne gave a scornful laugh.

"How did he manage to get it all done? You're dreaming, Father. There wasn't time."

"Wasn't time?" repeated the Consul. "Of course there was time, months and months of time. And the worst of it is, so far as I can see, that there's no bringing him back. An English marriage doesn't hold out here. The scoundrel!"

"What *are* you talking about?"

Jeanne gave a little gasp. A fairy world seemed to crumble to pieces before her eyes.

"About Mrs. Way, of course. Didn't she tell you her husband had disappeared again?"

"Mrs. Way; was it only Mrs. Way?"

The relief was too great. Jeanne broke into a nervous little laugh. Her father stared at her astonished. He could not see where the laughter came in.

"You silly old man, why can't you speak clearly?" Jeanne cried gaily. "I thought you meant that Dr. Smith had married a Chinese girl. And it's only A-kuei after all! Well, can't you get hold of him and tie him up this time? He's married already. He's committing bigamy. Get him arrested, and put things straight. I don't mind bearing witness against him myself. I told Dr. Smith the whole story of his behaviour up here the other day, Father. You see, I felt like sailing under false pretences. Cheer up, old man, I don't mind——"

"But I can't get hold of him, Jeanne. He is a Chinaman, and can snap his fingers at English law in his own country. That unfortunate girl has never been his wife since the day he landed here. And all the Chinese know it. I suppose he took good care to let them know. My dear, it is awful. She is bound to him, but he is free."

"Mrs. Way is bound still then?"

Jeanne's voice was eager rather than horrified.

"Yes. That is what makes it extra sad. The poor girl can never take another husband to protect her as long as that villain lives."

There was reproach in the Consul's voice. He had not expected Jeanne to take the news in this strange spirit.

"It's very sad, certainly," said Jeanne indifferently. "Where have you left her now?"

"She's at Dr. Smith's house."

Then Jeanne stamped her foot in the old childish manner.

"She shan't stay there! She must come here. I'm not afraid of Mother, if you are. I'll go and fetch her myself."

Jeanne was growing more and more puzzling. This was a new development altogether. Mr. Norris's brain moved slowly as a general rule; but where Jeanne was concerned, Jeanne the apple of his eye, he had occasionally flashes of perception.

"Jeanne dear, you mustn't go to-day. We must all sleep over it. You surely can trust your old father now, little girl, can't you?"

Jeanne's lip was trembling.

"My little one, it is quite safe. I told him months ago, and he is a gentleman, Jeanne."

Jeanne's arms were round her father's neck in a moment. Gateman, office-coolies, *ting-ch'ais*, all were forgotten.

"Whoever would have guessed she could be jealous?" Mr. Norris muttered to himself as he turned for his final tramp round the great lawn about half-an-hour later. "As if a story like that would prejudice any straight-thinking man. And as if any woman could become a rival to Jeanne, let alone that poor little girl down there? But, after all, there's no accounting for women."

Nor for men either, evidently. For the first sight that met the Consul's eyes when he entered his wife's room was Dr. Smith bending over Mrs. Norris's chair, taking her temperature in his usual every-day fashion.

CHAPTER IV.

There was nothing to be done, that much was clear. A-kuei had disappeared, and not even his mother knew where he was. So she swore by all that was sacred to her; but who would believe a mother's oath? Old Lin certainly knew nothing. He had cast off his son years ago, and now, when he practically belonged to another family, and so had no claim on, or obligation to, the Lin clan, the old preacher had become A-kuei's bitter foe. But, what was to be done with Lizzie?

This was the question that was turning the Consul's hair, or so much as remained of it, grey. The Mission had refused to have anything to do with her of any kind. Dr. Smith and Jeanne were growing impatient of her presence. The doctor had made his declaration, and the two were now formally "engaged." But still Mrs. Way stayed on at the doctor's house, a passive, sickly old-man-of-the-sea. No one had ventured yet to tell her of her husband's villainy. But three weeks were lengthening into four, and something would have to be done. Who was to do it, and in what way?

The doctor and Jeanne held council together one hot morning in July. In the hospital, of course, and naturally over the washing of the instruments.

"It must be Father," Jeanne said decidedly. "And of course she must be sent home. Father must pay for that."

To send people home is the unfailing panacea of the Far East. A patient whose case is hopeless is sent home by the doctor,—to die on the way. A distressed national is sent home by his Consul,—to be out of sight and mind. Very many of those who are sent home have no home to be sent to, but what of that? What the eye doth not see——

"Send home to where?" queried the doctor.

Precisely the question the Consul had asked. And Jeanne had the answer pat.

"She has a brother, I know, and must have friends. Can you conceive of any girl arriving at her age without any friends? It's ridiculous."

"Oh, if she has relations, that makes all the difference. But she always tells me she is quite alone in the world," the doctor answered. "I wish you would come and see her sometimes, Jeanne. She needs cheering badly, and of course I can only keep her company in the evenings or at meals."

"I don't care for her. I don't trust her," was the rather constrained reply.

The mischief was out. Dr. Smith looked astonished.

"Why, I thought you cared for her very much, Jeanne. You are always so tender-hearted to the unfortunate. That was what made me try to care for her too. She is so much to be pitied, so helpless——"

"God helps those who help themselves," Jeanne broke in recklessly. "There she sits and moons, and doesn't even take the trouble to ask after her own husband. No, nor after her own child. That poor little mite is left to the amah entirely. Faugh! I've no patience with such a woman!"

The doctor whistled softly to himself. It was a provoking habit of his when an answer was not ready.

"*I* shall decide this matter of her going home," Jeanne went on. "I shall take her ticket, and write to her brother to come

and meet her when she arrives in England. Of course Father will sign the letter, but I'll write the rough draft. She shan't go on living upon you any longer.

"I don't mind that; it doesn't matter to me in the least," objected the doctor. "It makes no difference in my house-bills."

"Then it ought to matter. Three people instead of one. You must be a frightfully bad manager, and your servants must swindle you abominably."

Jeanne laughed—an uneasy laugh. She didn't quite approve of her own line of conduct, when she took time to think about it.

* * * * * * *

Voices sounded clearly from Mrs. Norris's bed-room as Jeanne and the doctor walked up the path to the Consulate a little later in the day. One voice was that of Mrs. Norris, excitedly holding forth in a high-pitched key. Like the boom of a distant bell came the Cousul's voice at intervals, evidently making for peace, and entreating silence. And a little accompaniment of miserable, squeaky sobbing ran through both, and made Jeanne bite her lips hard as she stopped to listen.

Mrs. Norris had wiled away an idle morning by sending for Lizzie Way to come and talk to her. And once in her room, not out of malice, but out of sheer idle gossip had Mrs. Norris done what everyone else had shrunk from doing. Then, the story of A-kuei's villainy and its latest development in the repudiation of his English wife and marriage with a Chinawoman told, seeing that her words had apparently no effect (for Lizzie seemed utterly incapable of grasping the situation), Mrs. Norris had proceeded, after duly embellishing her tale, to impress upon Lizzie the necessity of at once leaving China.

"You are neither wife nor widow, Mrs. Way. It is quite impossible for you to live a day longer in the East. You must go back to England at once."

Here at last Mrs. Norris had hit the mark. Lizzie dissolved into tears, and implored Mrs. Norris not to send her away. She didn't care what the Chinese, or what anyone, thought or said about her. There was no place in England to which she could go; she had absolutely no friends. Her only relation, her step-brother, was as good as no relation at all. Moreover, she was sure the doctor didn't mind her staying in his house. Since she had been there she had darned his socks, and was going to keep his clothes in order.

"But there is someone else who is going to do all that. You can't live on a man in that way. I wonder you don't see these things for yourself. Eating the doctor out of house and home! And besides, you are keeping Jeanne out of the house. Don't you know the doctor and Jeanne are only waiting for you to clear out to get married?"

A look of utter astonishment spread over Lizzie's face.

"The doctor engaged to your daughter?" she faltered. "He never said a word to me about it. I don't believe it!"

And then the Consul had come in, only just before Jeanne and Dr. Smith arrived on the scene.

Mrs. Norris's bed-room was the gathering-place of the family. Long, dark brown, wooden Venetian doors, half open, softened the glare on the outside verandah. Through those half-opened doors, framed in by the verandah pillars, one saw, beyond the great Pride of India and the garden-wall, the river glittering in the dazzling sunlight. A great brown junk, laden on either side with Foochow poles, was dropping anchor with its noisy chain straight in front of the window. With a clatter, and the chant of many voices, the big bamboo sail came down, and five or six fussy little sampans (river-boats) wriggled out from the shore to board the vessel. It was a familiar sight enough, but it was one which the doctor was never to watch without a pang of sharp remembrance all the rest of his life.

"Doctor, do you want to get rid of me?" Lizzie Way asked Dr. Smith, standing near the open window.

What could he say? He cast an appealing glance at Jeanne, but Jeanne's head was stubbornly turned away. No help from her. Mrs. Norris chipped in angrily.

"What a question to put, Mrs. Way! You ought to be ashamed of yourself for putting it!"

"No one wants to get rid of you, my dear," the Consul interposed. "Mrs. Norris was only thinking of what would be best for you. Come down with me and take a glass of wine. You are not accustomed to the heat."

The reproachful glance the Consul cast at his future son-in-law as he put his own arm into Lizzie's and helped her downstairs was richly merited. Dr. Smith melted homewards without addressing either Jeanne or her mother.

CHAPTER V.

Dr. Smith put Mrs. Way on board the German mail-steamer at Woosung one evening in sultry September.

Lizzie had gone through many different phases in those weeks between July and September. At first, after the scene in the Consulate, she had refused to open her lips to anyone. It was during those days that Jeanne's conscience awoke, and she tried to make it up, as children say, with Mrs. Way. But all her advances were instantly repelled. And so Jeanne, beaten back from the mother, had taken up the child, shy, black-eyed Maimie, and had succeeded with her as only Jeanne could succeed.

But then, when Jeanne had entirely captivated her little one, a fierce jealousy of the girl blazed up in poor Lizzie. She who had never noticed her own child, who had indeed cordially detested her, suddenly awoke to the fact that the only being in the world that really belonged to her, the only thing which was really hers, was being taken from her. So now Lizzie Way would not suffer the little Maimie out of her sight. And as the mother never went outside the doctor's house, but lay all day long in a long bamboo chair, gazing vacantly into space, poor Maimie got no outing either. In a corner of the whitewashed room sat the amah stolidly, and Maimie crouched hard by. When the child moved, or whispered, or fidgetted, Lizzie pettishly scolded her.

So it went on all day till the evening, when the doctor came in from his work, and forcibly carried off the child for a romp with Jeanne. But then he had to take Maimie's place. For Lizzie's dread of being left alone had grown into disease, as had also her horror of intercourse with any outsider. Mrs. Norris had set the already unstable brain reeling, and each day the unfortunate doctor recognised that Lizzie was growing mentally worse.

Still, she had written to her step-brother in England, and an answer must surely come. If it didn't come soon, Dr. Smith felt that he too would take leave of his senses.

One evening, however, when he came back to her, having handed Maimie over to Jeanne, Dr. Smith found Lizzie leaning out over the verandah, watching the group in the garden below. She moved quickly to one side, and then lay down again on her chair. Evidently she did not want him to know she had been looking on. They had been fooling out of doors, as Jeanne was wont elegantly to term it. All over and about Maimie, of course, and quite regardless of scandalised, spying Chinese eyes. Maimie was such a grave, solemn, round child, just the kind to tickle, and to be kissed on both cheeks at the same time by two sets of lips!

"Doctor, I want to go home at once. Will you find out the first steamer I can take? It is September now, and you said I could start in September."

"Why this hurry?" the doctor asked chaffingly. "You haven't got your letter from your brother yet; and you know you are very welcome to stay here as long as you like."

Lizzie had her back turned to him. She was in the sulks that evening, the doctor guessed. There were some evenings when she deliberately treated him to her back. Dr. Smith hated those evenings only less than those on which she wept and wanted to hold his hand.

"I want to go at once," Lizzie repeated. "I will write and say I am coming now. Letters go faster than steamers, don't they?"

"Of course they do, if you don't follow the letters and go overland from Brindisi. But why not wait here and do the business comfortably?"

This was not to be an evening of sulks. Lizzie turned herself round, and lay facing him.

"Don't you know why, doctor?"

The doctor's heart stood still. Above all things he dreaded an explanation.

"Maimie is looking rather pale," he stammered out. "I think you ought to send her out more. The sun is not dangerous in the early morning now."

"I am not talking of Maimie."

A pause.

"Doctor, I want you to promise me to answer one question, only one."

Dr. Smith's hair stood on end.

"Can't promise anything," he answered lightly. "But, if you really and seriously think of starting for England soon, I'll bring Mr. Norris up to you. I hear his voice in the garden now."

* * * * * * *

They all went up to Shanghai to see Lizzie Way off. Mrs. Norris went because she didn't care to be left behind. Mr. Norris, because he was the right man to go. Jeanne went, from that feeling of compunction and self-reproach which had grown up too late. And the doctor went, because he couldn't say "no" to Lizzie when she implored him to go.

As everyone knows, Shanghai lies twelve miles up the Whangpoo, a tributary of the Yangtsze. Where the Whangpoo joins the Yangtsze there is a great bar, known as the Woosung bar, which has gradually silted up till no large ocean steamer can cross it. They are going to dredge the bar, by and by; in the

meantime a railway has now been laid for the second time from Shanghai to Woosung, near which latter place big steamers now anchor. But in the days of this tale there was no railway, and intending passengers by outgoing mail-steamers were taken down to Woosung on steam-launches, which occasionally stuck on the bar, but which were bound eventually to reach the ships.

The amah had struck, and had absolutely refused to accompany Mrs. Way and her "baby" to England. Nor had the doctor urged the Chinawoman to go. When Mr. Norris had suggested engaging a "travelling" amah in Shanghai, Dr. Smith had vetoed the proposal. It would be far the best thing for Lizzie to be obliged to exert herself, and the stewardesses on the German mail could always be relied upon to give help where children were concerned. Dr. Smith made a special excursion himself to Woosung, interviewed the ship's doctor, a clever and "sympathetic" young German; chose Lizzie's cabin, and finally took her down to the steamer and saw her off,——alone, by her special request.

This going with the doctor alone was a hard thing to ask of him, and Lizzie hadn't spared him in the manner of asking. She had blurted it out, with the offensive proviso that Jeanne should not be of the party, in the presence of Jeanne herself. But how could Dr. Smith say Lizzie nay? Jeanne moreover, wise now that it was too late, had smoothed his path. She kept Mrs. Norris out of the way; she even denied herself the parting with Maimie. So the three, Dr. Smith, Lizzie Way and Maimie, went down to Woosung on the noisy launch, with no one to wave them farewell on the Shanghai Bund and steamer jetty, Lizzie gazing sullenly before her, while the doctor tried in vain to make her laugh. What an eternal twelve miles! Dr. Smith could scarcely repress a sigh of relief when the mail-steamer, spruce and white, hove in sight.

The captain, the chief officer, and the ship's doctor were all standing at the top of the gangway, ready to welcome their passengers. They shook hands cordially with Lizzie, and the captain lifted Maimie up in his arms in a fatherly way.

"Put her down!"

Lizzie's voice was savage, and she literally glared at the well-meaning captain. Dr. Smith and the ship's doctor exchanged glances.

"I will take you below and show you the cabin I have chosen for you, Mrs. Way. Will you go first, Herr Doktor?"

"No, no, let us go alone," Lizzie whispered, clutching at Dr. Smith's arm. "I want you all to myself for this last time."

The German doctor bowed low, and turned away. And Dr. Smith, scarlet to his ears, carried Maimie down to the saloon.

"You will write to us, won't you, Mrs. Way? We shall look for a letter from you from every port. And I am sure you will find the people on board exceedingly kind and attentive to you. Let me introduce you to the stewardess."

Dr. Smith was feverishly anxious to avoid being left alone with Lizzie. If he could only get away, and tell the ship's doctor to keep within hail! But he could not stay on board, after all, much more than a quarter of an hour now. One anchor was already up, and the luggage and the mails were even then coming over the side. The launch whistled alongside, warning those who were to return in her to Shanghai, and time was hurrying on.

"I don't want the stewardess at all, at all. Won't you stay quietly with me for the last ten minutes?"

Reproach and anguish spoke in Lizzie's voice. Dr. Smith sat down silently.

"I am not going to tease you," Lizzie said quietly. "Don't move, and I won't speak."

She fixed her eyes steadily on his face. Dr. Smith fidgetted, and put his head down on Maimie's hair. People hurried to and

fro through the saloon. Near them a family, going home for good with a fortune, was bidding farewell to a crowd of Shanghai friends. The mother was tearful at the parting with the old life, the children recklessly jovial at the prospect of change, the father was evidently trying to hide his emotion in jesting. Dr. Smith watched the crowd out of the corner of his eye. He fervently hoped that they were all too much engrossed to notice him and his strange companions.

"Will you take me to my cabin now, doctor, please?"

Time was nearly up. Did Lizzie know this, and, if so, did she ask purposely?

"I'm afraid we shan't have time for that now, Mrs. Way. They will clear us all out in a minute. See, the others are going on deck. I must go too."

And he stood up, and stretched out his hand to bid her good-bye.

"Doctor, kiss me."

Dr. Smith looked round him in agony.

"It will make me happy all the rest of my life."

"The launch is starting, sir. You must come at once," sounded from the saloon-door.

"Please, please!"

"Good-bye, little one."

Dr. Smith bent down and kissed Maimie. Then two arms flung the child aside, and Lizzie clutched the doctor's sleeve.

"Hurry up! hurry up!"

The doctor gently disengaged himself, and kissed Lizzie good-bye.

CHAPTER VI.

Lizzie Way kept altogether in her cabin the first day, and would not come to meals. The captain noticed her absence, and asked the doctor what was the matter with her.

The young German shrugged his shoulders and nodded his head wisely.

"An interesting subject, Kapitän. A little rattling in the over-story. Bad husband, bad sickness, weak brain. Prescription for same: fresh air, fresh scenes, and a fresh *Schatz!*"

The doctor's English was still in the elementary stage, so he was fond of airing it on all possible occasions.

The captain went along the corridor and rapped at Lizzie's door.

No answer. He put his head inside.

Mrs. Way was lying on the berth underneath the port, gazing at the sky as it raced past the opening. An untouched meal stood on a tray by her side. And on the floor sat little Maimie, a finger stuck in her mouth, looking longingly at the food.

"Come, come, my child," said the captain cheerily. "This won't do, this moping down below. I will take you both on deck. You cannot imagine what a glorious evening it is."

And before she could resist or object, Lizzie found herself on deck, put carefully into a long chair. Maimie had disappeared, probably stolen by the stewardess, to whose motherly heart the forlorn little creature appealed. One after another of the kindly German officers came up and spoke to Lizzie. The erstwhile-tearful mother of the happy family going home brought up her chair, and tried to be friendly too. The children took possession of Maimie, and her little voice sounded joyfully in the distance. When the ship's doctor came to advise Lizzie to go below, since it was turning damp, she was quite pleasant to him, and agreed to his suggestion that they should breakfast together in the saloon next morning.

And the next day, and the day after, right down to Hongkong, Lizzie improved steadily, and Maimie's face grew broader by smiling.

But in Hongkong they lay four days, waiting for the mail from Japan. The officers went on shore, to be entertained by their hospitable fellow-countrymen there. The German mail-steamer was moored alongside the wharf at Kowloon, which is on the opposite side of the harbour to Hongkong proper. No one who can help it stays on board a steamer while she is coaling, or loading or unloading cargo, or waiting for the mails. So the Shanghai family crossed the harbour to stay at the beautiful Hongkong Hotel, and go up to the Peak, and drive to the Happy Valley. It couldn't be helped, but Lizzie Way was left almost entirely alone.

A new fit of moroseness had seized her when they made fast to the great wharf, and she had unamiably refused to go on shore with anyone herself. Nor would she allow Maimie to have an outing either. She lay again on the berth in her cabin underneath the port, listening to the rattle of the winches, and watching the huge bales of merchandise, hoisted up by the big cranes, slowly pass by her scuttle. Maimie must sit

and look too. Not even the stewardess might take her away. So there the child sat, finger in mouth, her great black eyes staring wonderingly at her mother, with a tiny wooden doll, secretly stolen from one of the other children, clutched tightly under her pinafore.

The stewardess at last grew weary of coming, and coaxing, and then Lizzie was left quite alone,—to think, and think, and think. Of what? The mere effort of thinking was becoming a pain, and Maimie's presence a nightmare. For when she turned her head towards her child, her husband stared at her from Maimie's eyes. Not her husband as she had once loved him—grave, proud, aloof, wearing his hardly-won Western laurels with a dignity that made him the central figure in a London drawing-room. Maimie rather represented the son of the dirty old crone who had awakened her from sleep at Taichow, and who was, Mrs. Norris had said, A-kuei's mother. Lizzie could not see the pathos in Maimie's eyes; the unnatural stillness of this forlorn baby of four did not appeal to her. Maimie only represented to her mother the wrong she had suffered; the child was merely the eternal witness to her blasted life.

When the steamer left Hongkong for Singapore the ship's doctor remembered that he had not seen his patient lately. It was a hot, oppressive evening, so he went to Lizzie's cabin to bring her up on deck.

"See, I have brought you the papers," he said. "There is news from Shanghai; here are to-day's telegrams; accidents; a rising of some secret society in Chehkiang; I don't know what more. If you will come on deck with me, we will read the news together. Come, will you?"

Lizzie turned her face to the wall and made no answer.

"Come, come, I take you up. I have not seen you for two, three days. I have your chair quite comfortable. Come."

Lizzie still made no response. And the doctor, slightly out of patience, tapped his foot and drummed on the door.

Then she turned slowly round.

"It is of no use your waiting. I am not coming. Go!"

Her voice rose gradually to a shriek.

The German was nettled. He flung down the papers on Maimie's berth, and walked away.

Lizzie had not expected him to take her at her word. Dr. Smith would never have gone off, but would have coaxed and petted her into coming with him. Lizzie was decidedly disgusted. Well, she couldn't go on deck now. The doctor would laugh at her. But it was lonely down below, all the more lonely because she could hear the voices of others laughing together on that deck where she might have been now. There lay the newspapers on Maimie's berth. She might as well look at them. Ssŭ-ming? What was this about Ssŭ-ming?

"Our Ssŭ-ming correspondent telegraphs that the body of the notorious A. K. Way, son of the preacher Lin now attached to Dr. Porteous's Mission, has been washed up at Hai-ching, at the mouth of the Ssŭ-ming river. Mr. A. K. Way, a Chinaman educated in England, had lately distinguished himself by deserting his English wife and marrying a Chinawoman. His body bears marks of foul play. An enquiry is being instituted.

"It would seem that the Chinese authorities in the Chehkiang Province have lately received warning of a projected rising of a certain secret society, with anti-dynastic aims, and from a reliable source in this port we learn that suspicion had fallen upon A. K. Way. With a view to save his own life, the young scoundrel turned informer, and having succeeded in getting his father-in-law imprisoned, he fled to Ssŭ-ming, intending to take ship for Shanghai, and thus escape to America. Why he did not do so at once is a puzzle, for by hanging about Ssŭ-ming for a week he gave time to his enemies to track him down. He was

last seen alive on Thursday evening just outside the Ssŭ-ming Consulate compound. His body was identified by his mother on Saturday morning. We may add that his deserted English wife and child left for home the very night before the murder must have taken place."

Was she dreaming that she was reading, or was she really reading what was true? Lizzie pinched herself hard to make sure she could feel pain. True? It couldn't be true. Dead, her husband dead, and to learn it now, so late——

She did not hear a rap at the door; she could not imagine how they came to be near her, the ship's doctor and the friendly fellow-passenger. She crushed the newspaper out of sight, and again turned her face to the wall. They had come to condole with and comfort her, come full of the very best intentions. They had just read the news on deck, and had hastened, filled with horror, to try to prevent Lizzie from reading it too.

"I am so sorry, dear."

A gentle hand touched her, a soft voice whispered in her ear. The fellow-passenger signalled to the doctor to leave her alone with Lizzie.

"It may be a mistaken report," she went on after a pause. "They do get hold of such wonderful news in Shanghai. Anything for copy."

Lizzie flung herself savagely round.

"A mistake, did you say? No, it can't be a mistake. God has heard me at last, and set me free!"

Lizzie's eyes glittered feverishly, and her voice sounded hoarse and hollow. Her companion shrank back. To rejoice at the death of a fellow-creature, however much a monster, horrified her simple mind.

"But dear——"

"Oh, don't 'dear' me," Lizzie interrupted fiercely. "Don't you see that I am free now, free from any chance of *him?* No,

you don't see, you don't understand. How should you? Go away, please go away. No, don't touch Maimie. How dare you? She is mine, she belongs to me, and you have no right to touch her if I say no. Come to me, Maimie."

The child hung back, one tiny hand grasping the visitor's dress. Lizzie reached out a skinny arm and roughly pulled Maimie to her side.

"Bad girl!" she said, with a sharp blow on the little one's shoulder. "Stay here."

"You really shouldn't, you really mustn't hurt her," expostulated the lady. "I shall speak to the doctor."

"This is my cabin, isn't it? Will you go at once, or must I have you turned out?"

Maimie's sobs followed her would-be protector along the corridor. But when the doctor, disturbed greatly in mind by the scene just reported, came to the cabin-door, he found it bolted. The electric light had been turned out, and silence reigned inside.

"We must wait till to-morrow," he said.

* * * * * * *

"When last seen Mrs. Way was sitting on the lower deck, at midnight. The little girl was on her knee, and she was kissing and fondling her. The quarter-master on duty thought it strange that she should be on deck at such an hour, as she rarely came out of her cabin at all. He had just gone forward to take the log when he heard a splash and then a loud shriek. Turning round, he fancied he saw something black balancing itself on the bulwarks. The next instant it had gone overboard. He sounded his whistle, the alarm was given, a boat lowered, the ship stopped, and we stood by for half-an-hour. The unfortunate lady had disappeared. Our doctor has given his opinion that the cruel news of her husband's death had unhinged her mind, since she spoke very strangely to a fellow-passenger about it early in the

evening. We have come to the conclusion that she first threw her child overboard and then jumped into the water to rescue it. I reported the circumstances to the authorities at Singapore, and obtained leave from them to send you the letter enclosed, which was found open in her writing-case, and was evidently intended for you."

"May I see the letter?" Jeanne asked her husband. They had been married only twenty-four hours, and had as yet no secrets from each other.

"Perhaps I had better read it first," Dr. Smith answered awkwardly. "You see, the poor girl was undoubtedly quite off her head."

Dear Dr. Smith,

The question you wouldn't let me ask you was this: Supposing I had been free, would you have chosen me instead of Jeanne? Because now——

There the writing ended.

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